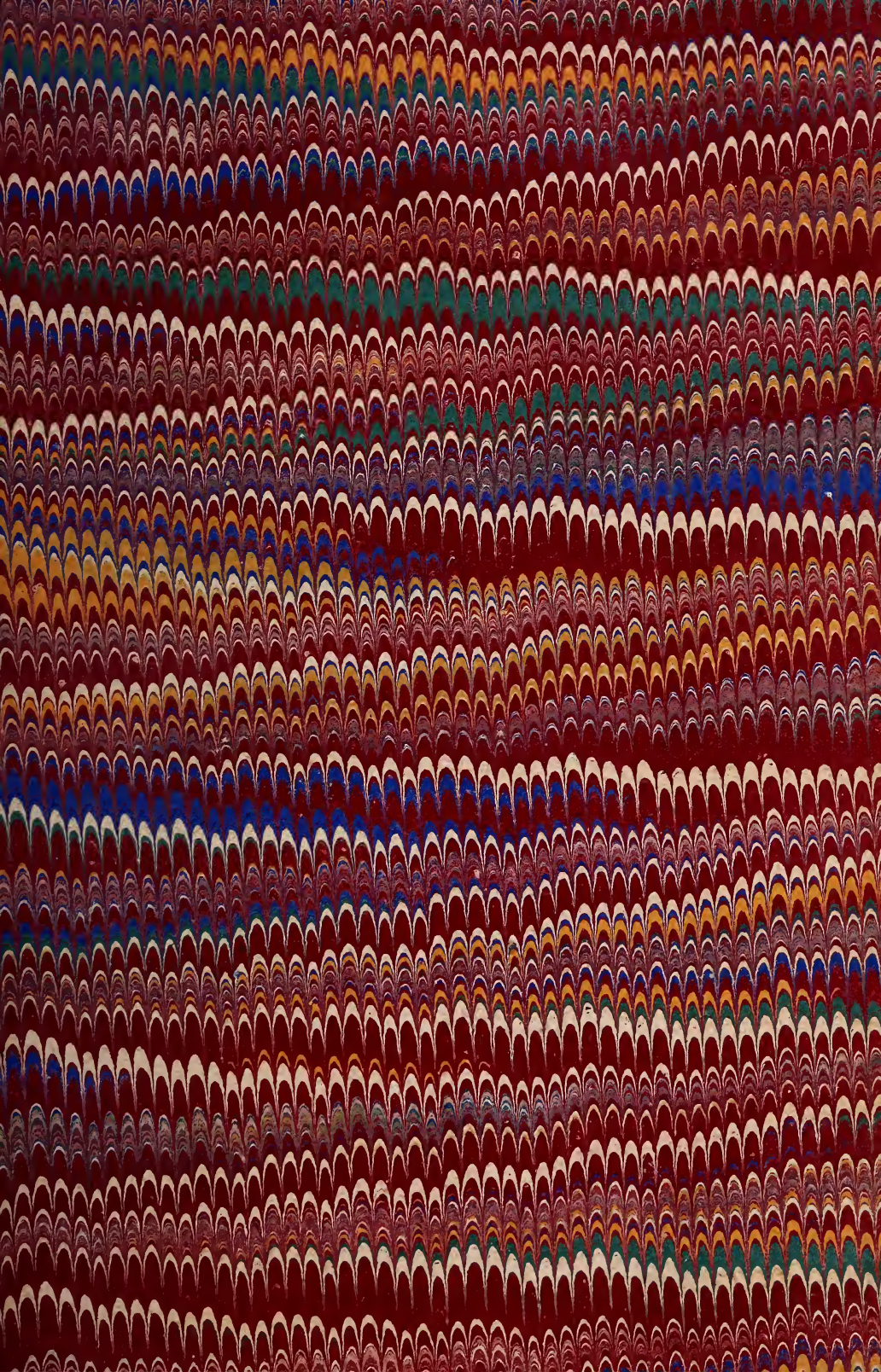


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THE STREETS AND LANES

OF

A CITY.



THE
STREETS AND LANES
OF
A CITY:

BEING THE REMINISCENCES

OF
AMY DUTTON.

With a Preface

BY THE BISHOP OF SALISBURY.



London & New York :
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1871.

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PREFACE.

I AM requested to add a few words of preface to this little volume. I willingly comply with this request, being thereby enabled to testify to the absolute truth of every incident related in it. It records, with necessary changes of name only, a portion of the experience, selected out of overflowing materials, of two ladies, during several years of devoted work as district parochial visitors in a large population in the north of England.

Perhaps I ought to be content with thus assuring the reader that he reads nothing here

but the mere unadorned facts, and to leave him to appreciate for himself the liveliness and ability of the narrative, and the cheerful sympathy and tenderness that have charmed me, as I think they will not fail to charm him, in every page of this little book. But I cannot refrain from drawing from this simple tale a strong inference as to the great value of the institution (so general in the Church of England, and so remarkably characteristic of it) of lady-visitors of the poor under the direction of the parochial clergy.

Rejoicing as I do with all my heart at the establishment of more formal methods of utilizing the devotion of such Christian women as from the circumstances of their families are able to leave their homes, and give themselves up wholly to Church work in sisterhoods,

institutions of deaconesses, training establishments for nursing the sick, and the like, I feel that we have in the widely-diffused practice of such parochial visiting in England, a link in the chain that binds various classes together in love and mutual kindness, of inestimable value. The lady who devotes a real portion of her time to such visiting, under the superintendence of the clergyman of the parish, and still retains her place in her family, and in the society of her friends, has, as is amply shown in this narrative, great opportunities of bringing to bear upon the poor the sympathy and assistance of those among whom she lives. Moreover, besides the direct benefits which she imparts to her poorer neighbours, and the family duties which she is still able to discharge at home, her position and work tend to break down the unfortunate dis-

inction between 'religious' and 'secular' life, which, while it does little to make the 'religious' more religious, endangers the abandonment of the 'secular' to more complete, and as it were authorized, secularity. Thus, as in one aspect the lady-visitor may be said to be a link between rich and poor, in another she helps to blend the 'religious' life with the 'secular,' and in both does service of extreme value to the Church and Nation.

But I must not indulge myself in pursuing these thoughts. I would rather let them arise naturally, as I think they will hardly fail to arise in the reader's mind, from the perusal of this little narrative.

G. S.

PALACE, SALISBURY,
Jan. 30, 1871.

THE
STREETS AND LANES OF A CITY.

CHAPTER I.

“Oh thought that writ
All that I met,
And in the tresorie it set,
Of my poore braine. Now shall men see
If any virtue in thee bee!”—CHAUCER.

ONE street, narrow, ill-paved, ill-lighted, and tumble-down, named Abbot's Street; at right angles with this street, one lane aptly called Crook Lane, for a crook it was and is to the magistrates and police of Norminster;—these together constitute Anne's and my district. On these, nine years ago, we gazed as utter strangers, not without a heart-sinking, for a more unpromising, mass of brick and mortar, and lath and

plaster, it would have been hard to find. Low houses of modern build, much out of repair, alternated with half-timbered gables resting each on a couple of worm-eaten oaken pillars, and nodding forward as though from age and decrepitude. Eight signboards indicated the existence of eight public-houses in Abbot's Street alone. There they flaunted almost side by side, as though the Abbot of Misrule, and none other, had given his name to the locality. A slaughter-house, several small hucksters' shops (at one of which a tall, lean horse was being unharnessed from a coal-cart and led through his owner's kitchen), a veterinary yard, and two pawnbroking establishments,—these were the most salient features in "the district." The children at play in the gutter looked mostly unwashed and unkempt. Some older girls and mothers, whom the sound of a wandering hurdy-gurdy had brought to their doors, looked listless, unfresh, and hollow-eyed. An individual, pointed out to us as a detective in plain clothes, was diving into courts and entries, and emerging again, like a bee from the bells of the foxglove. Morally and physically, the first *coup d'œil* of our district was grim and bleak.

Bleak in itself, bleaker by contrast. Heretofore, we had, like the Shunammite, dwelt among our own people, in our country home where our fathers had dwelt before us. I do not say that the tenantry on the Radnor estate were all model men and women, nor the farms and homesteads round Radnor Hall altogether Arcadian,—far from it : but there comfort and neatness were the rule, not the exception ; the old kindly feeling towards squire and parson and their families was not ashamed to show itself ; the sick and aged looked for our visits as a matter of course, and brightened at our coming ; they looked to us to share their griefs and joys, and in return took no small part in ours. Many a prayer from many a cottage hearth had “covered” our Crimean brother’s “head in the day of battle ;” many a kindly good wish had followed our sisters when they went forth from Radnor to other homes ; and when the “old squire,” full of years and infirmities, and perfected by patient suffering, had fallen asleep, and the muffled peal from our grey church-tower told that he was laid with his fathers, many had sighed at the sound of that knell as though it had rung for their own kith and kin.

All this was left behind, and it was not unnatural, I think, that Abbot's Street and Crook Lane should appear to us, by contrast, dull and bare at first sight, or that we should feel, in school-boy phrase, "left out in the cold."

However, it was "*the* district," and that was enough. Mr. Helps, the senior curate in charge of this end of St. Edmund's large, poor, and crowded parish, had assigned it to us, and was at our side, pointing out its limits and the system on which it was to be worked. To buckle to it "right womanfully," and bring plenty of hope-seed with us, to grudge no trouble, and look for no visible result—that was our business. The thistle, duty, must be grasped with both hands, and in due time it might turn into a sceptre.

I am not going to dwell at any length on the mode of working prescribed to us, which was more practical than showy. Each Monday forenoon we collected money for the clothing-club, not receiving it in a school-room, as in rural districts is often and successfully done, but gathering it from house to house, and thus establishing an *entente cordiale* with the inmates.

We always introduced ourselves as workers under the clergyman, but were glad and ready to receive the proffered contributions of people of all persuasions,—in fact, to rescue every available farthing from the “Pig and Whistle,” and our seven other natural enemies, the public-houses. Every fourth Friday, we, in common with the other “district ladies,” made over our gettings (often very considerable ones) to Mr. Helps. If he was absent, Mr. Rayner, his brother-curate—brother in heart, and hope, and aims—took his place. After the financial transactions were over, we stated to our clergyman any puzzling case that had arisen under our eye ; and such did arise not unfrequently. Things “not dreamt of in our philosophy” at Radnor rose up like spectres before us here ; children and adults unbaptized, and content to remain so ; couples unmarried ; stolen goods harboured (of which more anon). I believe Anne and I should have given way under this new and strange pressure but for Mr. Helps. He was eminently what the French call *secourable*, clear-headed, uniting quick perceptions and feelings with depth and calmness, a capital organizer, working hard, and setting and keeping others at work ;

doing the right thing, and caring not who got the credit ;

“ Yielding, nothing loth,
Body and soul, to live and die
In witness of his Lord ;
In humble following of his Saviour dear.”

These gatherings ended with a kind of commentary from Mr. Helps on one or another of the books of Holy Scripture ; this he prepared beforehand with great care and research, bringing his remarks to bear on our sick-visiting and general intercourse with our poor, in a way that was truly useful. Before parting, he scrutinized any new books or tracts intended for parochial use, and often added a selection of his own to our stock. He advised us not to deluge our poor—especially the men—with books, even sound religious books ; their leisure for reading being so limited, it is wise rather to direct their minds to searching the Scriptures of truth for themselves than to distract them with a multiplicity of imperfect human writings. The scores of vapid stories, flimsy little novels of a (so-called) good tendency, now printed for cheap distribution amongst the young, found scant favour in his eyes ; but sound practical tracts,

with *body* in them, he liked, and, indeed, we found them both useful and acceptable. "Can you spare us the 'Two Shipwrecks' another week, miss? My Jem is quite took up with it;" or, "You'll excuse the 'Three-fold Robber' getting crumpled in Bill's pocket, miss; he's a reading of it to the other tailoring lads at his shop in the dinner-hour." Such requests were not unfrequent, nor was it altogether a bad sign that when Mrs. Coppock, the self-complacent widow of an old parish clerk, returned me the "Companion for the Aged," she said, stiffly, "I should hope, Miss Dutton, you didn't mean them remarks about peevishness and covetousness to come home to *me*, for I would have you know I never yet were reckoned peevish, nor covetous neither, by none of my acquaintance." The disclaimer of all intention to be personal which I could honestly give, and the conversation that followed respecting self-examination as to our state before God, were not, I trust, without their use.

One word as to sick-visiting in the streets and lanes of the city. Its features wear a far sterner aspect here than in rural Radnor. Yet the town possesses some striking advantages over

the country. Norminster Hospital stands within a stone's throw of the lower end of Abbot's Street, and thither nearly all accidents, surgical cases, or fever cases were moved at once. We petitioned for and obtained leave from the Board to visit our people there daily, if we chose. Other sick poor were visited gratis at their homes by a hospital surgeon. To us, the prompt attention they received, and the absence of that mournful ghost of a country labourer's illness, the doctor's bill, appeared immense boons; but I doubt whether they were as highly appreciated by the recipients. They mostly claimed them as a matter of course, and it was painful to see how many persons in receipt of large wages, or keeping flourishing shops, would apply for a "recommend" for a sick parent or child, and think it a grievance to be gently reminded of their good position and ability to pay. Thus—

"Ilka rose maun hae its thorn,
And ilka gleam its shadow,"

in this imperfect world.

Many of the aged or sick paupers were removed to the workhouse (whither also we had free leave to follow them), and there ended their

days in comparative comfort. For "hard is the lot of the infirm and poor," and squalid are their surroundings in a low district like ours. Some had no sheets, some no blankets—perhaps they had been pawned for gin ; some had no bed at all, only a shake-down on the floor. The air they breathed was seldom pure. The utterances that came up from courts and alleys behind their houses were often coarse and quarrelsome. The niceties you find in most country cottages, the clean check curtains, the house-clock, the polished chest of drawers, were unknown here ; and their food lacked the savoury condiments which every cottage garden supplies—the thyme and parsley, the onion and cabbage. The contrast often saddened us, and brought to mind that fine line of Cowper's—

"God made the country, but man made the town."

Well, nine years have passed over our heads since that first anxious survey of our new district. Abbot's Street and Crook Lane have long been household words with us. To the eye of a stranger they look forbidding as ever ; but, to us, each tenement has acquired its own peculiar interest, has made its own nook in our

hearts. True it is that suffering and want, and vice, and even crime, have come before us in shapes not dreamed of before ; but everywhere we have met with some redeeming trait, some gleam, transient perhaps, of desire to be better, some "touch of nature" that "makes the whole world kin," and so, though far, far from forgetting our own people and our father's house, though the green and breezy haunts of our youth are by contrast fairer and sweeter than ever, yet we would not willingly forsake this sphere of action for that. The "garner of hearts" is here as well as there ; if the shadows, here in the city, are deeper, the lights are brighter ; if the furnace of temptation is heated seven times hotter here than in a well-ordered country parish, so much the purer is the metal that comes forth unscathed from it.

Now look at yonder three-storied brick house, only one window in breadth, wedged in between the baker's dwelling and that low-gabled beer-shop. There Abbot's Street begins, so indeed does St. Edmund's parish, as the "S. E. P." let into the wall shows. Can anything look duller than that house ? No porch, no eaves, no light or shade on its surface. Its tiers of windows

stare at you like dead, glassy eyes without lids or lashes ; the topmost one is partly filled up with paper. That house, nine years ago, was occupied by a couple named Cripps, hard, griping people, who sublet most of the rooms, and eked out the low rents they obtained for them by a system of speculation on their lodgers. I mention this at once, because it has a bearing on the "ower true tale" I am going to tell ; but their guilt did not fully come out till some years later, when Cripps and a son were put in prison for more aggravated theft. The family afterwards disappeared from our parish. Mrs. Cripps was a well-favoured, clean-looking person, with a fresh complexion and clear blue eye—"clear, but, oh, how cold !" She always seemed glad to see me, and showed no annoyance when I turned the deafest possible ear to her many broad hints for gifts or loans of money. Three of her rooms were tenanted by three aged women, or rather by four, if we include in that category a widow of seventy-four, who tended a bed-ridden mother of ninety-three. This good old creature it was my privilege to visit up to the very day of her peaceful Christian death. She, and "the young thing," her daughter,

occupied a ground-floor room. Overhead lived Peggy, a bustling Welsh woman, with a little "self-sufficiency of her own" which raised her above want. Most impracticable was Peggy; she could not read, and steadily declined being read to; ignored both church and meeting-house, and never appeared either sick or sorry; so that one had no handle given one by outward circumstances to get at her inward feelings. What a contrast to the occupant of the opposite chamber, where lay an insane woman waiting to be conveyed to the county asylum! Mrs. Iliff had been a farmer's wife, and had known affluence; but widowhood and poverty had come upon her, and sickness with fearful pressure on the brain; she needed watching day and night, having once attempted to throw herself out of the window, and once to stab herself with a knife cunningly secreted under her pillow. Some kind ladies paid her rent, and a trusty person to look after her; and as this person needed, of course, some hours' rest daily, we arranged to take our turns by Mrs. Iliff's bedside in her absence. The poor soul never attempted to hurt any one but herself, and a kind look or word generally calmed her at once; so our task was no hard one.

I well remember the soft, sad expression in her eyes as she listened to the old familiar psalm tunes I crooned while plying at my coarse needlework in the darkened room. She never reached the asylum after all; for while the authorities of "Magnus" and "Edmund" were disputing which should *not* bear her expenses there, the symptoms changed from violence to torpor, and she gradually sank.

One day, as I was leaving Mrs. Iliff, I was surprised to see a little old man, with white hair and shoeless feet, creeping up to the attic, tapping with his stick before him, as blind people do. Now, as the Crippses had four children, three of them biggish boys, I had taken it for granted they occupied the two rooms in the garret themselves. Herein I did injustice to Mrs. Cripps, who, like John Gilpin's wife, had a frugal mind, and so contrived to pack in an extra lodger, at the expense both of health and propriety. She accosted me, as my eye was following the old man, and said, "It's only Miles, the blind soldier; he's very queer; he keeps to himself, and won't let anybody do a hand's turn for him, though he's as dark as a beetle. You never met him afore? Not likely,

ma'am, you should ; for he never crosses the doorstep but once a month, when he finds his way to the Castle for his pension ; and last time he went that far, he got under the feet of a dray-horse, and must have been killed if somebody hadn't picked him up ! Has he friends ? Not one : they preaching folks got hold of him at one time, and made a great piece of work with him ; but he broke loose from them, and now nobody goes a-near him. He's very glum ; only he likes my Polly to sit in his room (that's our three-year old) ; and she is desperate fond of the old man, and stops with him all day sometimes."

This was not an encouraging account ; still my heart ached for the forlorn old man, and I thought I might at least give him the option of being visited and read to. So, two days later, I climbed to the attic and tapped at Miles's door, which stood slightly ajar. No answer, but a fidgeting within, and a shuffling of feet, and then the door cautiously opened. A thin, wiry little man stood before me, very erect, with a look of gloom and sour mistrust on every feature ; there was "no speculation" in those sunken eyeballs, as they turned uneasily in my

direction. Still not a word. I was taken aback, as we say here, and could barely muster courage to tell him my name, and my business there (which, at the moment, seemed no business at all), and to ask leave to come in. He still did not speak, but led the way to his neglected-looking hearth, where he faced me again, without sitting down, or asking me to do so. I told him briefly how much I felt for his great calamity of blindness ; how glad I should be if I might read to him from time to time ; how much consolation my father, who had been similarly afflicted for years, had received from listening to the Holy Scripture. "I'm obleeged to you, ma'am," he replied, puckering up his thin lips and looking sourer than before, "but it would be of no use." I could not insist after so decided a negative as this, so unwillingly bade him good morning, merely begging he would let me know if ever I could be of use to him. I returned to the door, which I had incautiously shut to, behind me, and lo and behold ! the door possessed no handle, nor any apology for one, and how to let myself out it passed my ingenuity to devise. Feeling somewhat foolish, I stated this delicate dilemma to the old man, and was aston-

ished at the revulsion it produced in his mind. The dormant chivalry in some corner of his heart was roused ; he came to my rescue quite alertly, fumbled at the door, then asked me in a deferential tone to look for a knife that lay in a rubbish-box in a dark corner of his den. He inserted the knife in the hole where the handle should have been, worked it backwards and forwards, and grew quite friendly and communicative over the operation. At length, "by dint of coercion and great agitation," the door flew open ; I thanked him, and was retreating, when he detained me to say hurriedly, "You are welcome, ma'am, quite welcome ; and if you will condescend to pay me another visit, I shall feel honoured." I put my hand in his, and received a cordial squeeze in return, and so our friendship began. The surly, defiant look passed from his face, never to return, leaving only an indescribable expression of sadness and hopelessness.

The main cause of this came out at our next meeting. Miles was of a morbidly anxious, nervous temperament, and blindness had brought with it deep dejection and the loss of most of his accustomed occupations. Then he had

fallen into the hands of some fanatics, well-meaning, doubtless, but ignorant, and cruel in their ignorance, and they had persuaded him that his blindness was a proof of God's wrath, and that no prayer or effort of his could turn that wrath away, since he was not one of "the elect"! Poor old man! with a burst of anguish he told me this, as a settled matter, from which there could be no appeal. He seems, in his despair, to have broken loose from his tormentors, and shut his door against them; but, like the wounded stag that crawls apart to die, he still carried the barbed arrow in his heart, believing himself "past help, past hope past cure." It needed a firm, experienced hand to draw out (with God's help) that rankling arrow, so I referred the case to Mr. Helps at once. He sought out Miles, and many earnest talks they had together, with the happiest result at last. After long years of bodily and mental darkness, during which

"The cold spirit silently
Pined at the scourge severe,"

the old man had a door of hope opened to him. He was so crushed and broken-hearted, Mr.

Helps told me, so shrinking and self-accusing, that he could hardly be brought to believe that no decree had gone forth against him; but when once, by no mere earthly teaching, that frightful delusion was dispelled, and the way to the throne of grace made plain, his childlike joy and gratitude knew no bounds. Like Ready to Halt at the sight of Giant Despair's severed head, he could not choose but dance; and though he danced with one crutch still, yet, I promise you, he footed it well! It was my happy office to read the Bible to him almost daily. These readings were the bright spots in his otherwise sad and solitary life. How every feature beamed with delight as he listened, and how fast the time flew! The intervening hours, I fear, still dragged on heavily for him, but when spring days became warm and bright, I prevailed on Miles to array himself in his "Sunday's best," and be led by us to the daily prayers at the minster. A blithe young niece then staying with us was his guide, and her "early voice so sweet," together with the fact of her being a soldier's daughter, quite took his heart by storm. He grew chatty, told anecdotes of his early life, and described scenes he had

witnessed in India, before the fatal ophthalmia had dimmed and then quenched his sight. He must have been well educated, and naturally observant and shrewd ; he clothed his ideas in such exceedingly picked and refined language as, now and then, provoked a smile. I remember his describing prettily the town of Meliapore, in India, where he had been quartered, and the chapel erected there over the probable site of St. Thomas's martyrdom. There were native Christians, he said, called St. Thomas's Christians, and they had churches not so very unlike ours and church bells that sounded home-like in the valleys ; their clergy wore white robes, and had wives ; their women, unlike the Hindoos, walked freely about the villages and bazaars.

Miles was exceedingly attached to the memory of his mother, "a very pious woman," and talked with loving regrets of the cottage home in South Wales, where he was born and reared. He had not seen that spot for "nigh upon" sixty years.

The chanting in our old church, especially of the "Nunc Dimittis," quite overpowered him at first. He shed many tears, and afterwards said

that, to his thinking, it was the gate of heaven indeed.

Still the old man's position was a distressing one. His infirmities were increasing upon him ; and the more helpless he grew, the more was he neglected and cheated by the Crippses. One day, I found him quite broken-hearted over some fresh unkindness, the nature of which he could not bring himself to tell. But old Peggy below stairs was less reticent, and flew out to inform me that she missed five shillings out of the broken teapot on the shelf in which she kept her money, and who but Miles could have taken them ? The Crippses had talked her into this belief for reasons of their own, that were "not far to find," and the obtuse old woman adhered to it, though she had not a shadow of proof to adduce, and though she was fain to confess that Miles had never wronged her of a farthing before. Her story gained no credence anywhere, and was indignantly rebutted by the two or three respectable tradesmen with whom Miles dealt. But the bare imputation of dishonesty was crushing to the sensitive old man.

Then it was that he owned to me that his

dearest wish for years had been to end his days in Chelsea Hospital. Without raising his hopes, I applied to my brother, Colonel Dutton, and he laid the matter before Sir Edward Blakeney, then Governor of the Hospital; who, in consideration of Miles's blindness, granted him admittance to Chelsea within a month of that time. When I took Sir Edward's letter to Miles's attic and read it to him, he was much overcome, and sank on his knees. First, he solemnly thanked God for granting his desire; then, kissing my hand, he prayed for a blessing on those who had obtained this boon for him.

There were some official papers to be filled up before Miles could be put on the list of in-pensioners, so, one fine morning, the old man was imported into our drawing-room, seated on a sofa, and plied with the questions those papers contained. Very quaint and entertaining were his replies, especially when the awkward inquiry came as to how many battles he had been engaged in? He certainly could not, like Othello, boast of any "hair-breadth 'scapes in the imminent deadly breach." "It *was* humiliating," he said, with a comic air of distress, "to have to confess that he had never come to the scratch

at all! A skirmish or two he had seen in India, but never an engagement." "But," he added, "that was my misfortune, not my fault; if I had been brought face to face with the enemy, I trust, ladies, I should have done my duty." The next question, "whether he had been wounded," was easily disposed of. "How could I have been wounded," he asked, "when I had never had the chance given me?"

He lived about three years after that, and was very happy and peaceful at the Hospital: we several times visited him there. It was pleasant to find him sitting in winter, on the high-backed settle by a bright fire; in summer, on a rustic seat under green trees, chatting with his brother pensioners. He looked very picturesque and venerable in the cap and dark blue undress uniform he generally wore, but the full dress, with scarlet coat and cocked hat, was overpowering for one of his small dimensions.

"He is our model man," the excellent superintendent of the pensioners told me, "irreproachable in every way, and never missing divine worship. He is liable now and then to fits of dejection, caused by his blindness, but a visit from the chaplain, or from one of the ladies

who read to him, soon cheers him up." That he might feel his helplessness the least possible, he had a small monthly remittance sent him, with which he paid such of his comrades as waited upon him. One or other of these veterans used to set down in writing his replies to my letters, often interlarding them with comments or anecdotes of their own, so that you may imagine they were not altogether very satisfactory or lucid epistles. One day, somewhat unexpectedly, we received from the kind superintendent the tidings of Miles's death, a gentle, peaceful, painless falling asleep in the Everlasting Arms.

The grand old institution under whose shadow his last days were spent, and near which his mortal part rests in hope, seems destined not long to survive him.

The baker's house, next door, has, like the "needy knife-grinder" of old, "no story to tell." The baker's wife—good-natured, slatternly soul—asked me in one early day, and showed a desire to "put in" to our clothing club, which might have resulted in the children's toilettes becoming neater and less tawdry; but the baker himself nipped our friendship in

the bud, by avouching in my presence that no stranger should meddle with his family arrangements. So,—every man's house being his castle, an axiom which district visitors are, I think, specially bound to respect,—I beat a retreat; nor has any opening for kindly intercourse since presented itself.

John Brent lives next door; he has for many years been the "right-hand man" of Mr. —, of Green Street. No man in Norminster is more respected than John. Honest, sober, intelligent, so much employed and trusted by his master that he is seldom at home, John ought, you would think, to be a prosperous, well-to-do man, but he is not; and why? I soon became acquainted with his wife, a pretty, dressy, sickly woman, with several children, one of them a cripple, and all wearing a strangely forlorn look. The house was a superior and well-furnished one, and lodgers of a bettermost class were to be seen there at first, but after a while they dropped off. One missed a silver watch, another his Sunday coat, and not recovering them, they went away in disgust; altogether the impression I received was that Mrs. Brent's untidiness and dressiness were her bane, and that of her family.

I tried anxiously to induce her to save her money and send her children regularly to school, but with no lasting success; her attempts at doing better were spasmodic and shortlived; yet it was impossible not to like the little woman, and her exceeding fragility gave her an interest.

After a while a fresh inmate appeared in the house, Brent's old mother—like himself, the picture of cleanliness, respectability, and honesty. She was all but helpless from paralysis, and her good son would not allow her, as too many "well-to-do" Norminster people allow their parents, to end her days in the poor-house. I fear, poor fellow, his dutiful care for his mother was frustrated, though by no fault of his. Widow Brent soon took to her bed altogether, and being "no scholar" craved continual visits and readings. It was no cheerful atmosphere, that sick room; she felt herself *de trop*, neglected by her daughter-in-law, disobeyed and "sauced" by the young ones. I am convinced now that a "coming event," which no one in Norminster suspected, "cast its shadow before" on her dying pillow, and darkened the last months of her blameless life. When the youngest child, a pretty boy of three, died of a neglected cold on his chest, to

his father's utter sorrow, she looked at me with a strange meaning in her dark, heavy eyes, and said—"Best as it is; he's ta'en from the evil to come." It struck me forcibly, by the bye, during the poor little fellow's suffering illness, that he clung to his eldest sister, but shrank away from his mother, and refused to go to her; it seemed strange and unnatural. Things grew worse after he was laid under the sod, and one day the widow whispered to me, "I want to tell you something, Miss Dutton; I *must* speak."

Glancing up, however, she saw one of the children perched at the foot of the bed, its round eyes fastened upon her, and, with a frightened look, she checked herself, only adding, "Another time: oh, I *must* speak." This scene made me very uncomfortable, and first drew my attention to the circumstance that I was never left *tête-à-tête* with her; the moment I entered her tiny room at the top of the staircase a child was invariably sent after me, and as invariably left the room when I did. It was curious, to say the least, and made one suspect there was a screw loose somewhere.

I soon revisited the forlorn sufferer, and tried to raise her thoughts to higher and happier

subjects than the petty annoyances of her fast waning life. But chapter and hymn only obtained a divided attention; and suddenly raising herself on one elbow, she uplifted her voice, and in a tone of unwonted authority ordered the spy grandchild downstairs. No sooner had it vanished than she threw the other arm round my neck to draw me close, and repeated, "I must speak—I must!" But alas! paralysis and agitation so thickened her utterance that it was impossible to understand a word, and before I could calm her Mrs. Brent was in the room, regarding us with stony eyes and a hectic spot on either thin cheek. The aged woman sank back almost with a scream. I remained with her some time as a kind of protection, then went home, promising her a speedy return, and promising myself to refer this singular and mysterious matter at once to Mr. Helps. But the end was nearer than any one had supposed; the power of articulation failed first, then the brain became clouded, and in a few days she died. Her good son pinched himself to lay her decently in the grave by the side of his boy.

Not many Mondays after that I found Abbot's

Street choked up with curious, excited gazers, and policemen passing to and fro between Mrs. Jones the pawnbroker's and Mrs. Brent's house. With breathless dismay I learnt that there had been an extensive robbery from a mercer's shop in the city; that a piece of rich blue silk, enough for a gown, had been brought by Mrs. Brent to Mrs. Jones, with a lame story of its being the gift of an affluent brother; that Mrs. Jones had, very properly, confided her suspicions to the head of the police, and that Brent's house had been promptly searched. To the astonishment of every one, it was found "crammed" with stolen goods from garret to cellar, in every spot where the master of the house was not likely to detect them. The wretched young woman and her eldest girl had been examined at the police-office, the former displaying wonderful coolness and cunning in her answers, the latter wringing her hands in such an agony of grief and terror as quite unmanned some of the spectators. What a fearful web of deceit was then unravelled! And the saddest part of it was that the children had been trained to be apt accomplices, not only in shop-lifting to a great extent, but in deceiving

their upright, noble-minded father. Stolen goods were brought to that house from towns twenty miles off, advantage being taken of Brent's incessant occupations abroad to stow them away under his roof. The children were placed as sentinels to give timely notice of his approach, and more than once the thieves who were in league with his unhappy wife remained whole nights in hiding on his premises.

Jessy, the girl, was soon liberated, and on her return home devoted herself with praiseworthy zeal to her household duties. A long spell of imprisonment has had, I trust, a beneficial effect on the guilty mother. Love of dress (she owned to me in the prison) had been the root of all this frightful evil. An elderly woman of depraved character, a denizen of Crook Lane, had aided and abetted her first attempts to possess herself of some article of finery by fraudulent means. Having thus got Mrs. Brent into her power, she made a cat's-paw of her, and introduced her into a nest of thieves, threatening, whenever her hapless victim tried to shake her off, to reveal the whole story to Brent. Thus the indulgence of a seem-

ingly venial fault led to a tissue of crime, disgrace, and misery.

“’Twas but a little drop of sin
This morning entered in,
And lo! at eventide the” soul “is drowned!”

The evening after Mrs. Brent’s trial, which took place at the next assizes, her husband came to our house and asked to speak with me alone. There was something awful in his stern, repressed grief, and the lines of deep suffering on his pale, rigid face. But he said not a word about his own feelings; he had come to speak of *her* and of the children. He was determined they should henceforward go regularly to day and Sunday school; would I have an eye to his little girls sometimes? As to *her*, she was his wife still, though a criminal, and when her term should expire he had made up his mind to take her back and give her a home, and do his best to keep her straight; perhaps if he had been more watchful over her this might never have happened.

Thus did this right-hearted man, who had judged of another’s truth and integrity by his own, try to excuse her by accusing himself! I have seldom felt sadder than I did that night,

as I watched him returning, with slow step and drooping head, to his worse than motherless children. Five years have passed since that interview, and Mrs. Brent is reinstated at home and all things appear to be going smoothly, but the look of care and sadness on her husband's brow remains deeply stamped. The children seem much improved; the Lord's day is strictly observed by them; in dark winter evenings their mother sometimes accompanies them to the house of God, but by daylight nothing will induce her to come forth or mingle with her former acquaintances. On one occasion only I heard of her partially breaking through this reserve. "I have nothing for the club this week, Miss Dutton," she said one Monday last autumn; "I spent it on a 'cheap trip' with some of the children to Haseldyne, my birthplace, last Friday; I longed so to see the old place again." I was pleased with this touch of feeling, and inquired whether she had any relatives still living at Haseldyne.

"Not one," she replied, the tears starting into her eyes and the burning blush into her cheeks; "I couldn't have looked them in the face if I had; but I *could* stand by my father's and my

mother's grave——" A burst of weeping cut short the sentence.

A queenly-looking old lady, an octogenarian inhabiting the next tenement, received us with open arms. Shakespeare's proverbial line, "What's in a name? that which we call a rose," &c. &c., was not verified in this instance, for with Mrs. King our name was our passport. She proved to be a "Dutton legatee," one of several aged persons (all dead now), who as freeholders' widows received an annuity of £8, bequeathed by our "foremother" Dame Dutton. We fell in with several of these widows, and very curious their reminiscences were of the old electioneering system, now a thing of the past—the days when seats in Parliament were contested, and gold showered down like rain, not from principle, nor even from party spirit, but from a keen longing for the distinction. Then Whig strained every nerve to unseat Whig, and Tory Tory; and the Trowtbeckes and Duttons spent (may I not say wasted?) thousands they could ill afford on this hereditary strife. Widow King, though oblivious of modern events, lighted up at the recollection of those stirring times. She described as occurrences of yesterday the chairing

of Sir Eyles Dutton in 179—, and how he caught a hunch of mouldy bread thrown at him on the hustings, cut a slice with his penknife, and ate it amid the plaudits of the rabble! Widow Gill, another legatee, was a child in those days, but didn't she remember that hay-harvest when the county election was pending, and her grandfather had the handles of the hay-forks painted blue and picked out with red, the Dutton colours! Widow Coppock had *her* traditions too. She had kept a day-school sixty-five years before, and the *élite* of Norminster had attended it. Our famous clockmaker, now an elderly gentleman, who wears a brown wig and enjoys a European renown for his mechanical skill, once lisped his alphabet at her knee and tasted of her correction. So did our leading upholsterer, and so did the last town-clerk but one! She delighted to tell how Sir Eyles and his three brothers, all tall and fair and free, used to walk round Norminster canvassing, and how she mounted her "Dutton" pupils on benches at the window to see them pass, and how Sir Eyles smiled at their red and blue rosettes, and the little "Duttons" hurrahed, but "the little Trowtbeckes sat still and looked sour!"

These humble chroniclers of old family anecdotes, as connected with county and city history, gave one curious glimpses into the life of the past century, and in particular into the reckless hospitalities of the Duttons to high and low; their packs of hounds and "mains of cocks," &c. entailing enormous expenses, poorly balanced by a little short-lived popularity, or by "Madam Dutton's" gain at a county race of "a 50*l.* plate for the running of her grey filly Timoclea."

The river of Lethe, says Lord Bacon, runneth as well above ground as below; and time, "the great winding-sheet that covers up all things in oblivion," is fast effacing every trace of the feuds and factions that convulsed Norminster sixty years ago.

CHAPTER II.

“But look your lore be true and wise,
The lamp you light burn clear.”—KEBLE

CONSISTENCY, we are told, is almost as hard to be met with as the fabled philosopher's stone. Yet what is a district visitor worth without it? It is a grave consideration that harm may be done—is done daily—by us district visitors, in as far as we fail to view our work in the right light, or to set about it in the right spirit. If we are harsh, if we are inquisitorial, if we are indiscreet in listening to “jangle,” or hastily acting upon it; if we allow ourselves in partialities or antipathies, or open our ears to flattery, or are spasmodic in our work—eager one week, flagging the next—these defects neutralize our efforts, and stir up much bad feeling, much impure sediment, in the hearts we desire to cleanse and sweeten. How much, then, do we lack wisdom! how

incessantly should we seek it, "secretly, among the faithful, and in the congregation!" At Norminster, we are happy in having the opportunity of presenting our collective requests at the Throne of Grace each morning and evening, in our old Abbey Church, and of listening there to those Scriptures without a right understanding of which we shall be as the blind leading the blind. Those "set, awful hours 'twixt Heaven and us," ought to help towards depth, and solidity, and humility, and shield us from the error we are often charged with, of "dealing in muslin theology"—a shallow, confident handling of sacred topics.

On the other hand, a constant, conscious leaning on the Divine Arm is needed, to save us at times from what an old writer calls "unprofitable sadness." What earnest visitor in the streets and lanes of the city does not sometimes start back appalled from the forms of vice that meet her? Can we see the ungodly forsaking His law, and not sometimes be "horribly afraid?" Nay, is not our belief in God's love sometimes harassed and distressed, if not liable to be unsettled, by the apparently wholesale ruin of souls we see in our worst courts and alleys? By

prayer and supplication alone, with thanks-giving, can our cheerful trust in that love be maintained. We learn at His footstool that we are here not to speculate, not to despond, but to trust and to work, and we commit those souls to Him who knows their disadvantages, their temptations, their ignorance, their hereditary taints, and perhaps sees in them "some good thing" not visible to us.

"Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it;
What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted."

There is a young fellow, Joe Huggins, now serving with credit to himself on a line of American mail steamers, whose history has taught me to despair of no one. His father, a dissipated character, died several years ago in Crook Lane. I happened to be at a sick person's near, when I observed a hubbub at his door, and some women ran to call me in to Huggins, who had broken a blood-vessel. He was lying on the floor in a pool of blood; the wife, half stupified with drink, was dangling rather than holding a baby in her arms, and two ragged little boys were staring at the scene and at the doctor

who was busy about the sufferer. "No use prescribing for him here, Miss Dutton," said the doctor; "unless he's carried to the hospital at once, the man hasn't a chance!" But when this idea was propounded to the wife, she flew into a violent passion, and declared, with screams and sobs, she couldn't let him go; "she didn't care what the doctor nor all the doctors in the world said; he wur her partner, and from that house he shouldn't stir." The busy doctor, finding his reasonings vain, shrugged his shoulders and departed, leaving the virago on my hands. I happily bethought me of an old gentleman of some position who lived not far off, and sent for him. He came to the rescue with great vigour and complete disregard of Mrs. Huggins's maudlin sentimentality, and worked so well that we had the comfort of seeing Huggins safe in a ward of the hospital within an hour. There he spent the last six weeks of his life in quiet, and amid good influences.

The widow "flitted," that is, changed her place of abode, as the discreditable and godless amongst our population are perpetually doing, and I lost sight of her for four years. She reappeared, in a house in a low court, within

another low court, off Crook Lane. Oh the squalor of that den, and its inhabitants!—the mother, and the one hapless girl whom she had brought up to sin and shame, so dirty that you could neither tell the colour of their garments nor of their skin; both had that abject, cunning yet impudent manner of replying when spoken to, which one is at a loss how to deal with. The *ci-devant* baby was now a puny 'cute-looking urchin of five, with face and hands deeply begrimed, and absolutely in sores for want of washing. A tattered smock was his only garment. The group was completed by a youth of twenty, very clean, and with hair cut short and smooth. He was lounging against the house-door, with a woe-begone, "hang-dog" look in his blue eyes, and the lines of starvation visible in every feature.

My object, that morning and many others, was to obtain recruits from this wretched purlieu for an excellent "ragged school" lately opened in its close neighbourhood.

Now little Jack Huggins, "and such small deer," were precisely the game I was after, so I greeted him and endeavoured to begin an acquaintance; but the incipient Arab looked

suspiciously at me, and ran for shelter to his big brother, clasping him tight round the knees with both his emaciated little hands. Such shyness being best dealt with by a little wholesome neglect, I now devoted myself to Joe, but could elicit little from him except that he had been out of work for many months, only getting a "job in the coal office" at very rare intervals. He did not grumble or beg, but seemed thoroughly crushed. It seemed strange that a "likely lad" should be unable to find employment, but, in my blindness, I never suspected the true solution of the enigma, viz. that Joe had been three or four times already in Norminster jail for theft. His last offence had been stealing some game at his mother's instigation.

I spoke to Joe at last about wee Jack, and tried to enlist his aid in getting him to school, describing the care, the kindness, the blessed teaching the child would receive there. Joe's pallid face lighted up at this, and he promised his co-operation with a heartiness quite unexpected. "Oh yea, *he* would wash him, *he* would comb his hair, *he* would put him in at the skewle door at the right toime, that he would! Jack should get some larning, that he should!"

and a look of strong determination gave his features quite a dignity. Meanwhile, it was amusing to see little Jack's face raised, in earnest attention to the dialogue on which hung his fate. The prospect of "skewle" had no charms for him, that was clear, but Joe's will was law, and must not be gainsaid; and presently, when the agreeable prospect of two dinners a week provided at the school for well-behaved starvelings dawned upon him, his objections to learning seemed to melt away. It only remained to provide him with such raiment as was absolutely needful, and this I promised, on Joe's hearty assurance that he wouldn't let it go to the pawnshop. "Now, Johnnie," said I, as we parted, "you are to come to our house with Joseph at six, and you shall have a little coat." "Oo ay, missus," was little Jack's prompt reply, with the most impish look and grin, "and see if I don't get a pair of trousers from ye too!" and the urchin laughed in my face. It was not easy to refrain from laughing too, so comic were his look and gestures; yet what deep tragedy lay beneath!

Jack has gone to school ever since—somewhat irregularly, it must be owned, except on dinner days. He looks you in the face now, and his

face and hands are clean, types and tokens of some degree of moral cleansing, we will hope. By Mr. Rayner's advice, I requested a kind neighbour, a town councillor, to give poor Joe some stone-breaking to do, by way of testing his willingness to earn his bread honestly. "Quite useless, ma'am," was his sensible reply; "I know the lad well—indeed, so well that he gets out of my way; he's been too often in jail to stick to stone-breaking; I'm sorry for him, for, bad as he is, he's the best of the bunch, but he'll do no good as long as he's at home."

"What is to be done with you, Joseph?" I exclaimed, almost in despair, when that same evening the poor lad came to our doorstep for some broken victuals to still the gnawings of hunger. He lifted his head, and with a wistful, earnest look, answered, "Send me to sea, and I'll do you no discredit!" It so happened that the wind was blowing a hurricane at the time, and some elms opposite our door were writhing and bending in the blast. "What," I asked, pointing to them and to the fast drifting clouds, "could you meet such a storm and not wish yourself ashore?" "I could," he said composedly, and the words have proved no

mere bravado. Through the kind intercession of one of the magnates of Norminster, Joseph was taken on board one of the fine line of steamers already alluded to, the benevolent manager being, of course, made fully aware of his antecedents.

Mr. Rayner helped me to "rig him out" for the region of icebergs through which he was to pass in that wintry season; he helped me, too, in the yet more important endeavour to break up the fallow ground of that young heart, and sow some seeds of Divine truth there. Joseph never having been put to school, nor taught even his letters, oral instruction was our only resource. A most attentive listener he was; and the simple grandeur of the Bible words seemed to rouse and rivet his thoughts. I shall not forget his awestruck mien when hearkening to the 19th and 20th chapters of Exodus, the Law given on Mount Sinai with thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes. I had proceeded some way through the Ten Commandments, when he stopped me with the impetuous cry, "I never hear'd a word on all this afore, only droonkenness!" Oh that his ways may be made so direct that he may

keep those commandments! So far he has done well; returned from several voyages with untarnished character, and brought me his wages with childlike simplicity to lay out for him. He has a small nest-egg in the Post Office Bank; small, because I cannot, and perhaps would not, hinder him altogether from helping his thriftless family. After one of his voyages he brought Jack (whom he had left ill) a costly rug from New York. Another time he expended a sovereign on his two other brothers, working lads, their mother having, as the kind woman they lodged with phrased it, "drank their boots one Saturday night."

Joe's steamer is his pride and delight, his home, his world; and when, after his last voyage, he brought a photograph of himself, and sheepishly squeezed it into my hand, he expressed much regret that the name of *her* (the steamer), woven in gold threads on the front of his sailor's cap, "warn't big enough to be read in the picter." Poor fellow! the Helper of the friendless has indeed cared for him, and drawn him out of the mire and clay, and ordered his goings. May so much love and mercy not have been bestowed in vain!

Look from the point where Crook Lane debouches into Abbot Street, at that one-storied house with sash windows and grass-green knocker. Thither would I transport you at once, with one glance only at the intervening house and the entry between it and Brent's. The house I never could glance at without a shudder, for a couple, "aged but unvenerable," dwelt and passed away there, absolutely enslaved by the demon of drink, deaf to the loving admonitions of their pastor, "charm he never so wisely," deaf alike to the voice of conscience, the manifold warnings sent to them by a long-suffering God. The house has been pulled down lately, and I am glad of it. The entry is mostly peopled from the Emerald Isle. Madame de Genlis's dictum respecting negroes, that they are either "tout bons, ou tout mauvais," might apply to these nine or ten families. Some of them are as inoffensive, hard-working, and grateful folk as you could meet with anywhere; others, again, as remarkable for brawling, drinking, begging, and telling unblushing falsehoods. The former class we are on very neighbourly terms with; and the trifling services we render them, in the

absence of any gentry of their own persuasion, are received with a fervour of gratitude quite disproportionate to their value. Polemics we mostly avoid, not from indifference, but from a conviction that they are scarcely within a woman's province; nor do they obtrude them upon us. In fact, their main spokeswoman, Stasy Riley, disposed of all controversial difficulties between us one day in the most summary manner, by exclaiming, "Och, darlin', where's the odds betwixt us, save that *we* say Hail Mary, and *you* do na'?" We were fain to accept the germ of truth in Stasy's sweeping assertion, and look rather for points of agreement than for points of variance with these honest people.

To return to the house with the grass-green knocker, occupied by a notable Yorkshire woman, a Mrs. Creyke, with her tailor husband and five children. Two of the rooms were reserved for lodgers. About eight years ago, on my return from a week's absence, Mr. Helps told me that these rooms had been engaged for a lady, the widow of a medical man, reduced, together with her three children, to utter destitution. Her husband had practised in England, then in

Australia, and at one time made a good income. But the crash of an Australian bank (in 1856, I think) had swept away his savings. He had removed to the gold-fields, but soon after died there at the age of thirty-five. The widow, up to the time of her marriage governess in a highly-connected family, had returned to England, and opened with energy and success a boarding-school for girls in a southern county town. But, alas! her health was undermined, and in a year or two her arduous work had to be given up. Next she had been attracted by a Norminster advertisement, and tried a small day-school in one of our suburbs. But the fatal disease was gaining ground, and a chilly autumn so told upon her, that all attempts at teaching had to be given up. The Epsom Medical Charity generously granted her two donations of 5*l.* each, but these were soon spent. Poverty deepened into urgent distress, and distress into want; happily, the true state of the case became known to the Rector of St. Magnus, and he raised among his parishioners a fund for Mrs. Fitzpatrick's immediate relief; her lodgings, often changed, and always for the worse, were still too costly, so she was trans-

ferred to Mrs. Creyke's, and the remains of the fund placed in Mr. Helps's hands for her benefit. All was done with the utmost care not to hurt her feelings.

I lifted the green knocker that November afternoon, not in the capacity of district but of morning visitor. If some romantic imaginings touching the poor lady, prompted by the knowledge of her many misfortunes and her brave struggles, had entered my brain, they took flight in her presence, "mocked by the touch of life's realities." She sat in a high-backed chair provided for her use, a rusty black shawl dragged over her shoulders, a rusty black cap set awry on her head, a plate of oyster-shells on the table by her side. Her face, when she raised it, showed traces of beauty of feature and complexion, but the brow knitted and lined with many furrows, and the irritable glance and fretful voice that scanned and addressed me, were chilling in the extreme. A tall, graceful boy of thirteen, who was lounging full length on the horsehair sofa, rose, however, and made up for his mother's shortcomings by the most profuse expressions of delight at my visit, couched in language

worthy of Lord Chesterfield. Thus the ice was broken, and Master Gerald and I kept up the battledore and shuttlecock of conversation pretty briskly, Mrs. Fitzpatrick only putting in a few plaintive words now and then, in a breathless whisper. Somehow, the boy's volubility and overstrained precocious politeness did not please me, contrasting as they did with his marked rudeness towards his mother. When I inquired after the younger children, the poor lady roused herself to say querulously that they were so incorrigibly naughty there was no keeping them at home; they had already picked up some playfellows in Crook Lane, she believed, and had run off with them, out of her ken! Gerald ought to look after them better; he must go and fetch them in now. But Gerald was conveniently deaf to this injunction, and blind to certain "nods and becks" of mine, intended to strengthen his mother's authority. A pause ensued, broken by the sound of pattering feet. I looked through the window, and saw an elegant girl of nine, with long floating golden hair, flying hatless through the foggy street with a rabble of rude Crook Lane lasses and lads at her heels. Her face was sparkling with

glee, as amid the noisy laughter of the others she sprang up to the knocker, and dealt a blow which shook the old house and the sick mother to their centres. The latter, with an angry moan, ordered Gerald to open the door; he obeyed, but so languidly that Mrs. Creyke had admitted the culprit and her little brother, and poured a volley of broad Yorkshire scolding on their heads, before Gerald was in the passage. I just heard Gerald say tartly to her, "Mrs. Creyke, how dare you speak so to Teresa? we are gentlemen and ladies, you know!" and then the little runagates entered hand in hand, looking so charmingly fresh and sweet that my heart went out to them instantly. The little violet-eyed Fred peeped shyly at me from under his long dark lashes, and a friendship was about to ensue, when poor Mrs. Fitzpatrick, quite exhausted, ordered them to the bedroom upstairs. Fred screamed and resisted, whereupon his mother bestowed upon him a passionate box on the ear, repented of as soon as given, and instantly followed by an equally passionate hug. It was a painful, uncomfortable scene to witness, and I rose to take leave. "Ah," she said, "you are like every one that comes to

see me,—in a hurry to go ; it was otherwise with me in my palmy days ;” and she sank back with a bitter little laugh.

This first visit was of a piece with many more. Mrs. Fitzpatrick grew visibly weaker, and the oppression on her chest made it agony to speak or move ; still she persevered heroically in coming down-stairs daily—to keep her eye on the children, she vainly flattered herself—in reality, to chafe the untamed little spirits of Teresa and Fred by sharp rebukes, and capricious orders she had no power to enforce ; and to confirm Gerald in the love of low company, and in habits of selfish cunning.

Mr. Helps partially remedied these evils by insisting on the trio attending our excellent National, Infant, and Sunday-schools, and several kind ladies took turns with us in taking charge of them at our houses on Saturdays ; still there was much to be deplored in the management of these poor young creatures, and their very quickness and cleverness seemed to aggravate the mischief.

My diary in March says, “A truly melancholy attendance : Gerald sly ; those pretty little ones daily wilder and ‘spoilter ;’ Mrs. F. eager that

I should write appeals to her (or rather to Dr. F.'s) connections ; replies *most* unsatisfactory ! The 'one thing needful' seems in danger of being quite thrust out of sight by these pressing cares and miseries. Seldom can I introduce any reference to it, or get her to listen to reading : one comfort is, that she sometimes quotes with interest remarks made by Mr. Helps on the passages of Holy Scripture which he reads to her."

Oh vain and arrogant stricture, as it seems to me in the retrospect ! What was I, reared in the lap of peace and plenty, blessed with the golden mean between poverty and riches, ignorant of the bare meaning of those gaunt words, hunger, debt, pennilessness ? What was I, that I should thus dissect a mind "sick with many griefs," racked, strained, and goaded to the uttermost by all these things, and more ? The sequel of this poor lady's history shows that there was a work going on within her stricken breast which God alone knew of ; its visible result was soon to appear and gladden our hearts.

It was not in Mrs. Fitzpatrick's nature, evidently, to do anything by halves. When the

hour came that the sinking frame could fight up against its weakness no longer, she quietly struck her flag, and folded her hands in calm waiting for the approach of the "last enemy." Her passive self-surrender was as remarkable as had been the feverish stir of the last three months. "All of a wild March morning" she took to her bed, and never rose from it again. She asked me to make arrangements with honest Mrs. Creyke for the expenditure of her weekly stipend; she even empowered her to control the young "destructives," and was rewarded for this great effort by a visible improvement in their behaviour. She was now so enfeebled that it became expedient to engage a respectable nurse-tender who lived hard by, to wait upon her. Though low and homely, the little bedroom was scrupulously clean, and furnished with many comforts by several ladies who deeply compassionated Mrs. Fitzpatrick. With what a restful feeling did I visit her now! There was the poor weary head lying calmly on its snowy pillow, the brown hair just touched with grey, braided smoothly back, the forehead no longer puckered with the lines of irritability and carking care.

And little Teresa and Fred, no longer frightened and bewildered by those alternate bursts of anger and tenderness, might now be seen nestling up to Mamma, and laying their rose-pink cheeks against her sunken and pale ones. It was too much for her sometimes, and her paroxysms of anguish at leaving these little ones behind were heartrending to witness. One day their clean clothes were brought in, and Nurse Dawes laid some small garments of Freddy's at the foot of the bed. "Take those little things away," she whispered to me, in a tone of intense misery; "I cannot bear to see them." Another day, when preparing to receive the Holy Sacrament, she lifted her hands and cried out, "Am I, oh, am I fit to meet my Lord and Master, when my mind is distracted for my poor children?" But the heavenly promises brought to her memory by good Mr. Rayner, who was present at the time, had a powerful effect in calming her. She no longer shut herself up in bitter, hopeless reserve; the "fount of tears" was happily unsealed now, and after an agony of weeping she was generally more hopeful and calm than before. We came to an explanation, too, which tended to relieve

her mind. The Fitzpatricks, she said, were proud, and had never "got over" their son's marrying a governess ; but when she was gone, she felt sure they would relent, and take charge of Gerald : to complete his education, and put him out in life, would be the extent of what they could do, for it seems they were as poor as proud. This negotiation I promised to undertake, if spared to do so. The two little ones might, by the united efforts of those who took an interest in their mother, be placed in orphan asylums ; and I ventured, after much thought, to cheer the dying woman with a solemn assurance that no stone should be left unturned to accomplish this. Her look of ineffable relief is before my mind's eye yet. "One thing more might I ask?" said she. "Might Gerald follow me to the grave?" I promised this too, and that he should not stand there alone, poor boy ; we would accompany him, God willing. "Then," said she, sinking back on her pillow, "I have nothing left to do but to fly to my Father's arms ! Dear friend, dear sister, read me a chapter from the Gospels ; the struggle is over now."

Mrs. Fitzpatrick lived ten days after this.

Her sufferings seemed much relieved by the recumbent posture, and the rest and warmth of bed; in fact, she made so great a rally that the hospital surgeon whom we had called in thought it possible she might linger for months; and Nurse Dawes and Mrs. Creyke looked at each other and at me ominously, the latter not disguising that she was heartily tired of "the concern," and especially of Gerald's insolent, deceitful ways, and flat refusals to do as he was bid. Clearly, however, the poor lady could not be moved, so there was nothing for it but to do one's best, day by day, for both parties, husbanding our small resources as far as was consistent with the sick woman's comfort. She, poor soul, knowing nothing of these difficulties, was growing quite cheerful and light-hearted at times, and really loveable and engaging. I think her mind was now much occupied with a review of her past life: she seemed to like clothing these recollections in words, so while knitting for hours by her bedside, only pausing occasionally to put to her lips a draught of milk or wine and water, I obtained a very vivid and thrilling idea of her adventurous career. She had been early left an orphan, with a younger

brother Fred, and a child-sister, Louisa. They both died very young: Fred was the apple of her eye, evidently; indeed she could not speak of him without dangerous agitation. In her boxes I found, after her death, exquisite water-colour drawings done by him: one of a wood with a primrose-studded bank in the foreground, another a sea-piece, were disposed of for considerable sums for the benefit of the orphans. I have in my possession letters from Mrs. Fitzpatrick to Fred, which it would be difficult for any one to read unmoved. She was, as I said before, governess in a highly-connected family, trusted and beloved; but she expresses her willingness to give up that position, and become a daily teacher, sooner than see Louisa unprotected. "If I can help Lou," she writes, "it will make me far happier than anything would that merely benefited myself. Dear Fred, as you truly say, I am not rich, else I would not dole out help to you so scantily: do not use the word 'pay,' for it implies a debt. I only wish my love for you paid back in similar coin. When I am in want of money, if you have any to spare I will accept it, but not as a debt. I have known your generous, loving spirit from a

child. May disappointment never break it! may celebrity and riches attend my dear brother, and enable him to gratify the wishes of his kind heart! My own dear Fred, none will rejoice in your success more than your Dora."

Her marriage had been one of true attachment: three years after it some friends in Australia, then at the height of its gold-digging fever, persuaded the young couple to join them. I keep, for the benefit of his children, a document signed by the passengers on board the *Martin Luther*, thanking Dr. Fitzpatrick in earnest terms, "for the care, diligence, and professional skill" which he had shown during the voyage to Port Phillip. "Those were bright days indeed," sighed the widow; "with my husband at my side, and my boy in my arms, no queen so happy as I!" Their pecuniary prospects were cheering too, for doctors rapidly grew rich in the colony then. Diggers, verifying the proverb "light come, light go," were prodigal in the fees they bestowed on their medical advisers; the lucky adventurer who threw away forty pounds on a "shiny gown for his missus," did not grudge twice that sum to the *Æsculapius* who prescribed for her successfully. So the Fitzpatricks put

by large sums, but lost all, as I have said. Sad, sad is the sequel of the story. Dr. Fitzpatrick went to the diggings, eager to retrieve his losses; and his wife, already detecting in his hectic colour and short cough the signs of incipient consumption, braved much hardship rather than be parted from him. With tearless eyes she described their life under canvas, beneath the burning summer skies of Victoria, the hum of busy, excited thousands, all seeking for "*they* bright things that lie thick as carrots underneath the 'arth;" the wild ecstasy of some, the gambling, the revelling, the ruin and despair of others. Night brought no quiet there, no respite from murderous brawls and orgies which the scanty police could not take cognizance of; there her husband toiled on, but a few ounces only repaid his exertions, and but for his professional earnings they must have starved. Then came the days and nights of rain, and the weary, heart-broken man worked on, often up to his knees in water, till a violent fever laid him low. A little hut on the edge of a majestic forest of iron-bark trees was their only refuge. There little Fred was born, truly a son of sorrow; and there his father died, conscious at the last, able to trust

his widow and fatherless ones to God, and so depart in peace. She told with straightforward simplicity how, in his dying hour, he had thanked her for her wifely devotion, and said, that "her rectitude had been his best earthly stay when all other supports had failed." He lies under the purple shadows of Mount Macedon, in the iron-bark forest, whose magnificent trunks, fluted with the exquisite regularity of Doric columns, form a vast temple to their Creator's glory. No clergyman was present to say the words of peace over the dead, or baptize the new-born child. An itinerant preacher, who was passing by that remote spot, was called in to perform the latter office for the delicate infant, its little life apparently hanging by a thread.

A subscription amongst the open-hearted and open-handed diggers defrayed Mrs. Fitzpatrick's return to England. Her narrative at this point strongly reminded me of an unpublished remark of Dr. Johnson's, handed down through Mrs. Garrick to a dear old friend of mine. It was announced one day in his presence that the recently widowed Marchioness of Tavistock had died of a broken heart. "Had the Marchioness of Tavistock," said Dr. Johnson, "kept a chandler's

shop, she would *not* have died of a broken heart!"

Mrs. Fitzpatrick's "chandler's shop" was that boarding-school I have mentioned: by it she supported her children till disease of the lungs forced her to give it up. When her powers of teaching failed, she painted and drew for a livelihood; when illness put a stop to that, she made artificial flowers, or cut out paper decorations for grates. It was harrowing to see amongst the few effects she left behind, these tokens of increasing pressure and decreasing strength. Who could wonder at any amount of irritability or exactingness of temper in one so afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted?

A great peace, and a growing appreciation of the "exceeding precious promises" of Scripture, were granted to the sufferer as time wore on. "'It is I; be not afraid,'" she murmured after me one evening,—"how beautiful that is! *Can* words be more beautiful?" And again, when, seeing her colour quite fade away, I paused in the midst of a Gospel chapter: "Read on; as long as *you* are not tired, *I* delight to hear." The hymn, "Sun of my soul," heard for the first

time, touched, yet soothed her wonderfully. One day, after lying still with folded arms a good while, she said, "Do you think I shall see Mr. Helps again?" I shook my head; he had been called away to his distant home by a sudden heavy affliction, and his absence might be indefinitely prolonged. "Then tell him I die trusting alone in my Saviour's death and merits—feeling myself most unworthy." She uttered these words very slowly, then added: "Tell him I thank him for his kindness, not as a friend only, but as God's servant sent to me." Little Fred now rushed in, and climbed on the bed for a caress: "Dear little man," she said; "he *had* become very rough, but is recovering his gentle ways by degrees; he has good abilities, I think, and will learn well." It was most thankworthy to hear this calm allusion to her darling's future. She played with him, smiled upon him, smoothed his dark hair playfully. She glanced archly towards me at some quaint saying of Nurse Dawes, whose professional talk about "shattered" nerves and "*pecurial* symptoms" frequently brought Mrs. Malaprop to mind.

That was the last flicker of the lamp. It was

a Saturday, and the noisy flow of market people and carts passing her window was incessant. Mr. Rayner had visited and prayed with her; she had afterwards begged me to read to her parts of "that beautiful Litany, where no one is forgotten!" The last tears those grief-worn eyes were ever to shed, had flowed softly over the petition for fatherless children. At six, I had gone home for an hour, leaving Nurse Dawes in charge; but before seven a motley group of Abbot's Street girls and boys stood at our hall-door, forming a kind of guard of honour to the sylph-like little Teresa. She, poor child, pale and quivering, could only whisper, "Mrs. Creyke says Mamma is dying; please come." A glance at Mrs. Fitzpatrick showed that she was indeed in the heart of the shadowy valley. "Is this death?" she had asked, rather of herself than of the women who stood around her. The door and window were set wide open, and the cold, darkening air streamed in to help her breathing. She once pressed my hand tightly, but it was evident her communings were no longer with earth, and that awful craving for absolute quiet which the dying often manifest was upon her. Once only she raised her hands

and eyes and prayed, "Come." The women stood aloof, and I watched by her pillow; no one spoke; the children were kept quiet in the kitchen below. A candle in the far corner of the room was left to struggle as it might with the night wind. I saw the stars coming out here and there, and thought she would soon be beyond them; but though there was comfort in that thought, a weight like lead seemed to press on my heart, and made each minute seem an hour. It was her utter loneliness and her dependence on strangers for the last offices, I think, that caused that dreary, chill feeling. A light footfall on the stair caught my ear, and I saw with great thankfulness a lady enter, who had been, from the first, foremost in acts of loving-kindness to the widow. She told me afterwards that poor Gerald had roamed as far as her house in the restlessness of his sorrow, and that, on hearing of his mother's sinking state, she had instantly come to join me. Together we waited the end, in stillness and speechless prayer; the deep-toned minster bell had not long ceased its nightly tolling at nine o'clock when the end came. It was preceded by an act which, though trivial in itself,

was very characteristic, from its rapid decision and energy. She faintly asked for "water," and some was brought, cold from the pump. I was holding the glass to her lips when she grasped it firmly, raised it above her head, and dashed its whole contents over her brow. A few moments more and the spirit had fled. "Thank God," Mrs. Atherton softly said. "A more desolate soul never passed away," were the words that rose to my lips. Then, as we gazed on, my friend added, "How young she looks, and *how* pretty!" I softly closed the poor eyes that had so often waked to weep, then followed Mrs. Atherton to the kitchen, where Gerald was hanging about, looking white and miserable, and the two little ones, sleepy and bewildered, were sitting on the knees of kind neighbours. The sad truth was soon told, and the wail that rose from the orphan trio as its full purport broke on their minds really cut us to the heart. For a time, we could only weep with them; then, the morrow being Sunday, we bent our thoughts to needful arrangements for their comfort. Gerald was to sleep at some respectable people's next door. A bed was extemporized for the little ones in the parlour. We undressed them and

heard their prayers ; and never shall I forget the pathos of those childish white figures kneeling at our side, nor the mournful cadence in those treble voices as together they chanted "Our Father, which art in heaven." It was the cry of the fatherless indeed.

The further history of these orphans does not belong to the "Streets and Lanes of a City," so we will dispose of it briefly. As Gerald's mother had predicted, the tidings of her death had a mollifying effect on the Fitzpatrick relations, and they at once took charge of Gerald, engaging to complete his education, and set him up in business. He is still with them in a far distant county, and we keep up a regular correspondence, for the sake of his young brother ; we hear of him also from the clergyman of his parish, who would fain be his friend and counsellor ; but "life is thorny, and youth is vain," and the temptations to self-indulgence are strong around him, and find, we fear, a ready response within him. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel ;" these words describe him but too truly now. May he be led to seek for stability and strength at the hands of Him without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy !

Teresa and Fred were left absolutely destitute, no barrier between them and the Union but the tender mercies of Norminster; and most tender those mercies were. Money flowed in as soon as their needs were made known—more than enough to maintain them for eight months under the roof of a couple who showed them parental kindness. Meanwhile a vigorous canvass was set on foot on their behalf, and before the anniversary of their mother's death they were each of them happily settled in a noble Orphan Institution near London.

So general was the feeling of commiseration excited by their case, that the widow of an opulent tradesman, unknown even by name both to us and them, left a small legacy to each orphan in her will. How at her death that will was disputed, and how Mr. Helps, Dr. M——, and myself were subpœnaed, and had to appear in the Probate Court at Westminster to give evidence upon it, and how the matter was settled by compromise, as most matters are in this world, need not be dwelt upon here; for assuredly such doings are no necessary, or ordinary, offshoot from district work.

Fred, now a "senior boy," is receiving an

excellent education ; he seems full of promise in every respect, is perfectly happy at school, and enjoys his yearly holidays at Norminster, which he calls "home," and loves as a home.

The dear, fragile Teresa passed through her school life with an irreproachable character. She and Fred always met for their holidays in Norminster, and clung to each other with a peculiar love. She spent some weeks under our roof, when about fifteen, in order to be instructed for confirmation by Mr. Rayner ; and very sweet and modest and conscientious she was. There was much reserve and diffidence in her nature, and some tendency, I think, to melancholy. Deep in her heart lay the remembrance of, and the yearning after, her mother, and after that other grave in the Australian forest. She loved us intensely, as her eager obedience, her watchful care to save us trouble, and sometimes her close clinging embrace, testified ; and Fred she loved with a tender devotion, which had something of grave, quiet motherliness about it : but her heart's most earnest human longing was after her parents ; and He who knoweth our frame, and well knew hers to be unequal to the burden and heat of the day, lovingly called her before it was

noon to share the rest of those weary ones. In her sixteenth autumn she meekly received her first communion, kneeling at our side in Norminster Church. Her second and last was administered a few weeks later to her by Mr. Rayner on her death-bed. She had faded like a leaf in the interval ; she was spared all acute pain, distress, or fear in those last days. She “knew she was going to Mamma, and she was glad to go,” she said, “and she hoped Gerald and Fred would be good, and come too.” Day by day, her hopes and aspirations after a love better than even mother’s love kindled and burned more clearly, and resting on it she calmly passed away with her hands in ours, and the Name that is above every name on her lips. Dear child ! every remembrance connected with her is pure and peaceful. “Fair, fair, with golden hair, under the willow she’s sleeping ;” and near her sleeps the mother to whom her faithful little heart had clung to the last.

So that brick house with the grass-green knocker is associated in my memory with much of the poetry of life : indeed, the thoughtful district visitor will meet with gleams and flashes of poetical feeling everywhere, save where con-

firmed, unblushing vice, like a mephitic gas, has extinguished them.

Yonder tall, gaunt woman, who stands with arms akimbo at her door in Crook Lane, could thrill you through if she chose to speak, for she is one of the few survivors from the well-remembered troop-ship *Birkenhead*, lost near the Cape with her freight of gallant soldiers. Once, unasked, Betty opened to me on the subject; her homely words sketched powerfully the seething sea, the helpless women and children "shoving off" in boats, the parting cheer from perishing husbands and fathers, her own Serjeant B—— amongst them—silence after that, and the noble fellows sinking, sinking, as still as a stone, into the heart of the sea. Awful recollections to brood upon! but to Betty their sharpest sting lies in this, that whereas she, like her husband, had been a "decent body and good liver" then, her life has been an evil one almost ever since; not, however, without sharp twinges of conscience, which Mr. Rayner tries hard to turn to good account.

Here we close our district "experiences," fearing lest they should become, as Hotspur says, "tedious as is a tired horse." Before pro-

ceeding to the kindred theme of sick-visiting in the workhouse, let me say a word about our "mothers' meeting." Here Anne and I, whose districts though side by side are wholly distinct, have the comfort of working together. Here we have the help of zealous friends, especially Mrs. Meade, whose cheerful co-operation has, I think, saved the undertaking from collapse. Now, by dint of a long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether, it is, thank God, doing well. The mothers flock in ; some of the roughest and coarsest are visibly softened ; hundreds of yards of flannel and calico have been paid for, and made up on the spot into clothing for themselves and their families ; several of their big girls, whose idle, lounging habits used to make us fear the worst for their future, have been induced to go to service, and are doing well in respectable situations. In fact, the mothers' meeting seems to act as a magnet, and attracts such of the women, both old and young, as retain some desire to do right. The books read to them, and the carefully selected hymns which they join with us in singing, have certainly produced a purifying effect on some of their minds.

CHAPTER III.

“ Oh miracle, that thou shouldst 'scape unharm'd !
Oh proof that angels watch thee, tender flower ! ”

ISAAC WILLIAMS.

“ Consideration like an angel came
And whipp'd the offending Adam out of him. ”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE proverb, “Extremes meet,” is not the less true for being trite. That the extreme of modern civilization touches on barbarism, no one acquainted with our crowded towns will deny. But the proverb is nowhere more fully borne out than in the day-rooms of our city workhouses. Which are the most corrupt of the many corrupt ingredients that ferment there, leavening more or less the whole lump, however unremittingly the authorities of the place may strive to repress evil? It is not the once hard-working but now broken-down cottager, not the toiling man or

woman that could never earn more than sufficient to keep the wolf from the door, and now justly claims parish help for his or her last days. No ; the scum of its population will be found to be inmates who have received a high-class education, been put in the way at some time of their life of realizing a good income, held advantageous positions, perhaps in the middle rank of society, fared daintily, clad themselves expensively. These, when through self-indulgence they have fallen (and self-indulgence, we know, is the perilous incline down which myriads slide into vice, fraud, or excess), fall low indeed. I have seen such persons, when over and over again rescued by some relative from their degraded position, and put in the way of retrieving their character and circumstances, slip back in a few weeks into the quagmire of vice, and return to the workhouse, all manly or womanly feeling, all self-respect gone ! I have seen such, been called upon, as you shall presently hear, to mix with them at trying times, and can conceive nothing more repulsive, more base, than their deep-grained selfishness, varnished over with an affectation of superior breeding. These inmates—not the rough, ignorant, but honest poor—are

the plague-sore of our Unions, turn the title of House of Industry into a satire ; make its roof an upas-shade, deadly to the boys and girls reared under it. "I would not," said a keen observer, "insult a Red Indian by comparing him with such as these !"

One such "sinner, destroying much good," came under my notice in connection with district work, four years ago. Wylie was a man of some attainment, capable of holding a clerkship, quick-witted, and well-spoken. But he addicted himself to vice, leaving his wife and four children to starve or beg. It was as a sick-nurse that poor Mrs. Wylie first came in my way ; I saw her again, laid up with a fever she had caught in her vocation, and which proved fatal. The children had no home but the Union, their worthless father being in jail for some fraudulent act. They were pretty little creatures, but dwarfed by lack of nourishment and warmth, so two of the little girls drooped and died early. The only boy soon followed them, passing away, however, not in the poor-house, but under the roof of a former master, who with rare kindness took him to his own home, cherished him till he died, and laid him in his own burial-place. So,

of the whole family, only Wylie and little blue-eyed Becky remained. I never failed to look after Becky in my periodical visits to the Union school ; but one day Becky was not to be seen, and in answer to my inquiring looks, I suppose, a dozen little paupers volunteered the information that "her was gone ! her fayther's toime (in prison) wer hup, and he had coom black-guarding, and taken Becky away." No one could tell whither. "He had cut his stick, and gone on the tramp with Becky, and an orgin, or summut!" So Becky vanished from our horizon, and, do what I would, no trace could I obtain of her. The thought of this delicate child of five dragged from place to place by her bad father, ill-used, taught to beg and whine and tell lies, in order to fill his pockets and minister to his vices, haunted me, and, in my blindness, I often wished her at rest in the pauper's grave with her mother and little sisters.

I had strongly enjoined the children to let me know should Becky be heard of, and one day, eighteen months later, the desired tidings came. Becky was "in town" with her father, quartered at Lowe's lodging-house in Spitfire Yard, off Green Street ; they had turned up unex-

pectedly the night before (Thursday), and Wylie meant to be "off again Saturday." There was no time to be lost; so flinging my previous programme of morning's work to the winds, I bent my steps to Spitfire Yard, maturing on the way a long-cherished plan for Becky's rescue.

I found this lowest of our low haunts in a state of uproar beyond even its wont. A dense mob had closed round one of the dwellings, their attraction being a drunken man, who was trying to batter down his mother's door. The terrified old woman, it seems, had locked herself in, and her calls for help, mingled with his threats and oaths, made a hideous din. I was thankful to hear somebody say that somebody else had run for the police, and presently a boy called out, "Mind yourselves; here's the Bobbies a-coming!" I meanwhile mounted a doorstep, and sheltered in a large kitchen where two or three women were bustling about. A man in a threadbare coat of fine cloth, with a greasy velvet collar, sat with his back to the door at a large table. A capacious tin inkstand stood before him; the table and window-sill were covered with written sheets of paper drying, and his pen was flying

glibly across another similar sheet. Glancing over his shoulder, I saw at once that they were copies of some sort of petition such as are frequently left at the doors of the rich, and extract large sums from the credulous, indolent, uninvestigating portion of the charitable public. "This must be Wylie," I thought, not without trepidation, as my glance was met, and then shunned, by a sidelong look from those hard, cunning eyes. He noiselessly pushed away his literary effusions into a corner, then stood up and faced me, reeking with bad tobacco and spirits. I felt that Becky's fate hung on this colloquy, and tried, like the cupbearer of Artaxerxes in his great strait, to dart a thought upward to the "God of heaven," and commit all to Him; He, who is not willing that one little one should perish, would perform the cause that I had in hand.

The woman of the house was civil, and, in reply to my inquiry, pointed out her lodger as Wylie. I told him, that having been informed of his flying visit to Norminster, I had come at once to ask after the welfare of his little girl: "Might I see the child?"

"Assuredly I might," he replied; she was

playing about somewhere, he would step out and fetch her. I watched him diving amongst the rabble that still choked up Spitfire Yard ; Becky, it seems, was there, enlarging her mind by studying human nature in its worst aspect. He soon returned with her.

Becky had been described at the workhouse as so much out of health, that I was prepared to see a pale, emaciated starveling, not the broad-faced, cherry-cheeked little personage that now came to my knee, smiling from ear to ear at the sight of an old friend. Too hastily accepting her plump, rosy looks as indications of strength, I expressed satisfaction at the child's appearance, to which the father replied with a sardonic smile, "No wonder, ma'am, she looks well when I've just been taking her a tour in the agricultural districts." These were his very words—a nearer inspection, however, changed my opinion, and showed that poor little Becky was swollen and almost dropsical ; the flush in her face was unnatural, the soles of her feet were hard as horn from tramping barefoot on the highways, her blue eyes were heavy and bloodshot. "Touring about in summer may be all very well," I said, "but it is October now, and the

early deaths of your other children should be a warning to you to house this one before winter. She is old enough to go to school, and would it not be far better for her than this vagrant life, where little good and much harm may be picked up?" Of course Wylie had a hundred excuses ready—his poverty, his inability to give her a home or pay for her schooling. I expected this, knowing him to be a desperate character, hardened by dissipation, and indifferent to his child, except in as far as he could make money by her; but it seemed right in the first instance to try persuasion, to turn the heart of the father to the child if possible, as much for his sake as for hers. This endeavour failing, I had another arrow in my quiver, more likely to hit the mark. There is in Norminster an Industrial School—"Ragged" would be too great a misnomer for it—admirable in its order and in the parental kindness of its master and matron towards the inmates. Here the younger Fitzpatricks had been boarded for many months, and thriven wonderfully both in body and mind, and here I had already obtained leave to board Becky (though below the regulation age), should she turn up in our town and

need a shelter. If the wretched father could only be induced to leave her there for the next six months, it would be something gained; some seeds of good might be sown in the little heart, some care taken of the little body.

So I laid the proposition before Wylie, and when he found that it involved no sacrifice on his part, he seemed to incline a favourable ear to it. A hint which I was able to add, that certain influential persons in the city had their eye upon him, and that if "anything happened" to Becky the consequences to himself might be awkward, clenched the matter. "Becky should go to this school," he said, "and the sooner the better; but he hoped I would consider the child's feelings: she was as loving as a pet-lamb, and would be dreadfully cut up at parting with him; he hoped he might visit her occasionally at this school?"

"As often as you please," I replied, well knowing that the meeting of parent and child was never objected to in that institution, under due *surveillance*. "And now, Mr. Wylie, no time like the present. I will call a cab and take Becky to her future home at once, if you please; and you shall come too, and judge for

yourself whether it will not be a happy home for your child. Be kind enough to pack her things at once."

"Pack her things!" cried Wylie, with a grin; "why, bless you, she's nothing in the world but what she stands in—pack her things, forsooth!" and he laughed loud and chucked Becky under the chin. Concealing my disgust as far as might be, I led the way to the next cabstand, and installed Becky on the seat opposite to me. Wylie mounted the box; I had managed to warn the driver to look to his pockets while sharing his seat with so questionable a fare. Little Becky's ecstasies at the drive, the shops, the novel position altogether, were quite enlivening to witness; but I remarked that the few words she uttered were in a deep, hoarse, unchildlike voice, which made me fear that her chest was affected. We reached the School, with its pleasant garden-plot in front, and were greeted by the matron with that frank smile which wins all hearts to her. I explained my errand in few words, and noted her tender greeting to the little stranger, and how Becky clung to her and nestled by her side at once. So the matter was settled; Wylie presently

took his leave with much affectation of reluctance to part with his child; it was painful to see how she shrank in evident fear from his embrace. I left the little one quite comfortable with her new guardians, and walked blithely home, filled with thankfulness for this unlooked-for success. One drawback alone remained, the fear lest Becky's father, missing her as a source of gain, should return by and by and take her away. This fear was shortly after done away with, for Wylie was lodged in prison for felony, and the magistrates at once added Becky to the list of "certified" children, thus securing her from being meddled with by her worthless father. She is still at the School, "under the protection of the Secretary of State," and a promising, sweet-looking, and very good child; her health, long delicate, is mending; her warm heart and cheerful temper make her the pet of all, and whatever trials may be in store for her when the day comes that she must leave this haven of peace, she is receiving such an education as will fit her to bear and overcome them.

Our tie with the workhouse hospital and widows' room waxed closer year by year, as

many of our district friends were draughted there. Other denizens of Abbot's Street, young persons perhaps of whom we had hoped better things, cropped up from time to time in that hospital, to our utter grief, with health and character blighted. These needed all our care, and (the staff of visitors under the chaplain being woefully inadequate to the work to be done) we could not exactly confine our feeble ministrations to them, but tried to help as many as could be attended to, calmly and thoroughly. The master and matron, Mr. and Mrs. Lomax, were always ready to give us the benefit of their experience, and to back us in our efforts. So too, as long as she remained in Norminster, was Grace Oakley, the daughter of a deceased clergyman. She lived near the union-house, and, renouncing society, which she was singularly fitted to adorn, worked steadily in this and other rugged fields of duty. Even with her help and the Lomaxs' one was often at a loss to judge correctly of the characters and circumstances of the sick folk congregated under that roof. Poor creatures! mostly strangers to us and to one another; some of all creeds and some of none; some victims to the profligacy of their so-called betters in the

social scale, sad and bitter of heart; others blithe and reckless of the morrow as little children. We have seen a scoffer in one bed, in the next a fervent, single-hearted Christian, "having nothing, and yet possessing all things." We have been plied by one aged widow with whispered petitions for "a noggin," while in the opposite bed lies another, in her ninety-sixth year, thirsting for the Water of Life and for that alone. "Read to me of *His* coming," she says; "oh that it might be this night!" And another day: "I have been dreaming all night of *Him*; He stood in His brightness by a river side, and the river sparkled like silver, and His saints and angels were round Him; I could tell the saints by their long flowing hair," &c. Dear old Widow Rose! this dream was only the reflection of her waking meditations; no enthusiast she, but one who had feared the Lord from her youth: "a reg'lar church body," she playfully called herself, and the assertion was verified by her intimate acquaintance with collects, Liturgy, and Psalms in the Prayer-book version. Begin where you would in any of these, she was sure to know the strain by heart, and murmur it after you. I never in any rank met with such an instance of clear-

headed, warm-hearted piety at so great an age. "She's a right-down good old woman," says the nurse of her ward, "and so thoughtful for me ; if she's in ever so much pain at night, she won't let me be waked." And another of the widows says, "I've known Mrs. Rose fifty year—a stirring, striving body, and the goods she sold was always good and always reasonable."

But I must not linger on this refreshing theme, nor detain you amongst the widows in their neat ward, the bed-ridden ones lying cosily under crimson coverlets, the more able-bodied sitting "croose and cocket," as their kind nurse says, round a bright fire. Nor must we tarry long in the old men's ward ; but we will say a cheery word or two as we pass to well-meaning, ignorant old Kit, who lies there blind and paralysed, and "glad of a word frae ony decent body." Ask how he is, and he will tell you he "feels verra dillicat ; he don't look to be better, nor better off i' this world, but he do hope there'll be a nice corner keepit for him up *there*." Just glance at that half-wit who sits in the elbow-chair by the fire ; he looks, and is, a rustic, born and bred not far from Radnor. He is an odd compound of shrewdness and simplicity: the

former quality predominated in a memorable reply he made when reproached some years ago for not shedding a tear at his only sister's funeral: "Hur is i' heaven, and I've no handkercher!"

Let us pass on to the men's accident ward. There is an individual there whose mysterious case illustrates life in the streets and lanes of our cities, so we will pause by his bedside. In order to reach it we must pass through that courtyard where scores of pigeons are disporting themselves round the pump-trough, or rising to the wing at our footfall. Those pigeons are as dear to me as the "iridescent" doves of St. Mark were to the writer of the "Stones of Venice." As they peck contentedly the crumbs thrown to them in this abode of penury, then rise in graceful circles above its roof, above all the sadness and squalor, into the summer air, they seem to read me a parable. They are types of many a happy soul that has accepted its lot within these walls with patient acquiescence, and in due time winged its flight to the abodes of perennial sunshine and rest.

Look at that narrow couch in a corner of the accident ward. It is empty now, but for seven months a young fellow, whom we will call

Leonard, lay stretched upon it in such extremity of pain that our workhouse doctor, "albeit unused to the melting mood," could at times scarcely bear to look upon him. Leonard was a Londoner, a stranger in our northern latitudes till one autumn morning in 186—. A labourer going to his work in the twilight heard groans proceeding from a spot at the foot of a steep cliff that overhangs our tidal stream. There he found a tall, slight lad lying in helpless agony, having fallen over the cliff. Help was procured, and he was carried to the Norminster Hospital; meanwhile, on examining the ground where Leonard had lain, it was found strewn with housebreaking tackle, not of the most artistic make, but such as clearly to show the poor lad's present occupation. It was supposed at first that he had intended to break into a lonely dwelling that stands upon the rock, but this was not the case; he seems to have attempted a house in the outskirts of Norminster, and finding himself in danger of detection, to have fled across country, rushed through a fringe of bushes, breaking boughs and twigs as he went, and fallen headlong five-and-twenty feet at least. Conceive what he must have felt on waking

from the swoon which followed this plunge, and finding himself alone in the dark, sure of detection, writhing and helpless, with the conviction that the young life and wild activity within him were quenched for ever; and all this without one glimmer of faith or hope to make it endurable, one inkling of the guiding Hand that even then had not forsaken him. No wonder that his goings on the two months he remained in the hospital were more like those of a hurt and captured wild animal than of a rational being. He returned only evasive or insolent answers when an official inquiry was instituted into his doings that night. He met the patience and indulgence of matron and doctors with scanty thanks, and to Mr. Rayner, who in the absence of the usual ministrations tried to work upon him, Leonard seemed truly "the deaf adder that stoppeth her ears." A couple of very "fast"-looking young men came down from town to see him one day, bringing him "lots of tin," and the ward was more astonished than edified by the three talking and joking together in a "lingo" unintelligible to every one but themselves. When they were gone, Leonard sank back in sullen despair, glaring at the visitors who from curiosity, I

fear, lingered near his bedside. How he writhed under their inspection no one guessed at the time, but I remember his telling me in the workhouse that "strangers used to come and stare at him as if he was a villain; and though he was bad enough, he wasn't *that!*" Poor boy, his notions of right and wrong were hazy indeed! He was so young, so full of vitality, that he lingered much longer than the doctors had thought possible, and so after many weeks he was moved to the workhouse. In looking up a pauper from Crook Lane one day, I found Leonard laid on that narrow couch in the corner. Narrow though it was, it was wide enough for him, for, the spine being paralysed, he could not have the relief sufferers so dearly prize, of tossing and turning about. Oh, the bloodless hue of that young face, girlishly fair as it was, with soft brown hair and eyes of the colour of the speedwell in June. I hesitated whether to accost him or not, for we were complete strangers to one another. A friend whose advice is law to us had recommended our not going near him in the hospital; the lad was too "cocky" already, got more notice and spoiling than was good for him; it was truer kindness to

keep aloof. Here the case was far different, as the nurse (a hard, bad woman, sent away in disgrace afterwards) remarked, "There would be no great ladies, nor grapes, nor tit-bits for him here." So seeing his large eyes following me wistfully, I paused to inquire how he was—I feared in much pain.

"I'm all pain," he replied, with that hopeless look that often since has cut me to the heart; "and I'm so lonely!" A pause ensued.

"Then would it be a comfort to you if I were to come from time to time and visit you?" I suggested.

"It would."

"And when you are tolerably easy, we will have some reading?"

He nodded assent, shaking back the damp hair from his forehead; and so the intercourse began, which for seven months gave me food for thought and deep anxiety. It was a trying, fitful kind of intercourse. At times he grew quite confidential, and told enough of his history to show that he had had a wild, godless, reckless bringing up. His mother (we have since ascertained) was an habitual drunkard; his father, and at least one brother, belonged to

a London gang of burglars. They lived in great luxury usually; salmon at 5s. the pound, and the earliest vegetables from Covent Garden, were no uncommon delicacies with them. Leonard had often had "as much as £30 in his pocket:" how obtained did not transpire. He had picked up a fair amount of education, and read a good deal, mostly in the Jack Sheppard and comedy line; but he was not devoid altogether of better knowledge, had parts of the "Pilgrim's Progress" at his fingers' ends, and alluded sorrowfully to a time when he had been fond of attending the London "churches and chapels." From a child he had been brought up to live on excitement: for that far more than for gain he had thrown himself into betting, gambling, and racing; for that, I verily believe, he had tried his 'prentice hand at housebreaking, for he clearly did not care for money for its own sake. Whenever mysterious remittances dropped in to him by post, he sowed his largesses broadcast among the paupers, so he was rather a favourite with them, in spite of his imperious temper, aggravated and stung by pain. An intense contempt for meanness was one feature of this strange, contradictory lad, and he could hardly tolerate

the presence of Nurse Hobbs, the woman alluded to before, who certainly was a revolting mixture of cheating and cant. Now as to our readings, it was harder than you can conceive to fix the attention of one so *blasé*, so utterly "used up." The chaplain did all for him (and the other sick) that the claims of a curacy and of pupils would admit of; and sometimes Leonard listened and begged him to go on, but as often he pettishly shut his eyes, and said he couldn't bear to be spoken to, it went through his head; and then no wonder the chaplain was disheartened. More than once he dismissed me and my book on that plea. And who that looked at his ghastly colouring, and the dark lines under his eyes, could consider it altogether a frivolous and vexatious one?

I found such readings as the "Rocky Island," Monro's "Dark River," or "Anecdotes of Christian Martyrs," most effective at first in rousing Leonard's attention. He was not blind to the beauty of "Golden Deeds,"—nay, at times grew boyishly eager in listening to such narratives. By these steps we gradually mounted to the point whence we could contemplate the King of Martyrs Himself, His atoning death, His life of

divine holiness, mercy, and purity. Not seldom, some word of His would rivet Leonard for the moment; and an earnest Amen would testify how heartily he appropriated the suffrage petitions from the Litany, with a few of which our readings generally closed. These were his happiest moods; more often there was blank listlessness, or a disposition to chat about the merest trifles, or to discuss at great length his own symptoms or the preparing of his food. This last was a fertile topic, kind Mrs. Lomax winking at certain small cookeries that went on at Leonard's own expense, under his own eye; so I often had to bide my time, and work my way to the one matter of vital importance through a disquisition on fish-sauce, or the best way of stewing a beefsteak.

There was a buoyancy about Leonard that seldom let him realize his dying state; the love of life was strong within, and when at times the conviction that it was ebbing burst upon him, I have seen him fling the sheet over his head and weep long and bitterly. At other times he was wilder in his mood, like a bird in the snare of the fowler, fluttering and dashing itself in vain. I think, however, his spirits grew

more equable, and his mind less utterly afloat as time wore on.

One day he pulled a letter from under his pillow, and begged me to read it. It was from his only sister, and his face lighted up as he talked about her. Agatha had married at sixteen, after rejecting, by her brother's account, as many suitors as Penelope. She was barely twenty now, but had lost her only child, and was heart-broken in consequence. Her husband worshipped the ground she trod upon, but he was little at home (Mr. Lomax thinks he is an adventurer devoted to the turf), so she led a lonely life, and brooded over the loss of her little boy. "She's a very pretty young lady," Leonard said in his quaint parlance, "and as good as she's pretty, and many a bow and smile I've seen her get as she has walked through Bishopsgate with me."

The genuine brotherly feeling made up for the pomposity of these details, and I read Aggie's letter with interest. It was indited in a flowing hand, its spelling and grammar perfect, its contents artless and sad. She was longing to see her dear, dear Leonard ; she had sent him a money order, all she had ; she was so glad he

had a friend to read to him, and she begged him to return to his Father in heaven at once, for she was sadly afraid his time must be short in this world ; she hoped soon to see him, her husband having faithfully promised to bring her to Norminster ; they would take a lodging near, and she would sit with him every day.

Some weeks later I unexpectedly found Leonard not alone. A coarse-looking, expensively-dressed, middle-aged woman sat by him, whom he named to me as his mother, and a small, child-like figure in mourning was bending over his pillow. This was Aggie ; you could have told them to be brother and sister by the great likeness, only her face was rounder and less blanched. She said little, the mother taking all the talk upon herself, but there was a world of expression in those sad eyes, and they swam in tears as she timidly pressed my hand. Leonard lay looking at his sister wistfully, but placidly. He pressed me to remain with them, but I soon took leave, first entreating the mother and sister, in his hearing, *not* to distract but rather to help him in his preparations for the solemn change that awaited him. The mother replied in a proper and feeling manner ; Aggie's

soft eyes expressed her acquiescence, and so I left them to themselves. The next evening I believe they returned to town, but the pure sisterly influence had not been used in vain, and Leonard was visibly calmer and more thoughtful afterwards. I am not saying that he was a model penitent—far from it. Would that he had been such! There was irritability to the last. Seldom did he express the sorrow for past sin, or the aspirations after holiness, which yet, I trust, were no strangers to his breast. One had to take comfort from his earnest entreaties for the 51st Psalm, or the Litany ejaculations, or the Story of the Prodigal. One was thankful to learn from good Mr. Lomax that his talk, though often trifling, was never vicious or corrupting. I gladly treasure up his dying assurance that he bore ill-will to none, not even to Nurse Hobbs, who had taken his few remaining shillings from under his pillow. These straws I would fain hope indicated that the current of his thoughts was running in a right direction. He had no tinge of presumptuous security about him. "I am praying, oh *so* hard!" were his last intelligible words that bright day in May on which he died.

With characteristic eagerness, he had sent a second messenger after the first to hunt me up in Crook Lane, and say the end was near. In unconsciously Shakespearian phrase the messenger said, "Leonard was sinking—sure to go at the turn of tide;" and so he did. I found him perfectly conscious, longing to be "prayed with." In the unavoidable absence of the chaplain I recited passages from the Psalms, and brief suffrages from the Prayer-book, at intervals, and he joined heartily; only once a troubled look came over his face, as Nurse Hobbs planted herself in front of him, and he said sternly to her, "Leave me." She left the room, quite cowed for the moment, and did not reappear till all was over. "Leonard," I whispered anxiously, "you quite forgive?" "Quite," he answered, carrying my hand caressingly to his icy lips, and keeping it there while the breath came more and more slowly and fitfully; "go on, please." Oh, the look of anxiety on that young brow! He spoke no more, except those few precious words that I have mentioned, about "praying, oh *so* hard!" The tide was now ebbing fast, and so was the life, and by six o'clock all was still. The workhouse

inmates, usually callous to such events, were, I scarcely know why, deeply stirred by sympathy, or curiosity, or both; groups of them hung about the courtyard, eyeing his window in shuddering silence. The cooing of the many pigeons sounded like a lament, as I wended my way home.

Poor boy! poor Leonard! That headlong fall over the cliff was surely ordered in "kind austereness" to save him from inevitable vice, perhaps crime. "There is mercy in every lot:" there was mercy in his, though so deeply mournful when looked at in the light of this present world only:—

"Fear startled at his pains and dreary end,
 Hope raised her chalice high,
 And the twin sisters still his shade attend."

He was buried handsomely, as we say here, his brothers sending a liberal remittance to Mr. Lomax for the purpose. None of his kith or kin were present, nor have they been heard of in Norminster since. I obtained Agatha's address, and wrote to her after the funeral, but my letter was never acknowledged, possibly never received.

CHAPTER IV.

“Not sick, although I have to do with death.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THERE lies on one side of Norminster Hospital a pleasant open space of two or three acres; it is bordered on the west by a double row of elms, through which the autumn sun often glints red and round at its setting. Beyond these trees stands a picturesque, broken-down tower of the fourteenth century, wreathed in ivy. This enclosure has been called the Plague-field ever since the year 1615, or thereabouts, when Norminster was desolated by a terrible pestilence. In the old records of the town may still be seen payments made on behalf of “the poor cabiners,” that is, the plague-stricken inhabitants who were moved from their homes to huts built here on the “lazzaretto” principle for their

reception. Within a stone's throw of them a large pit was dug for the hasty interment of the plague's many victims. After the epidemic had cleared away this trench was bricked over, and neither it nor any part of the field has ever since been built upon. We have often looked out by moonlight on the Plague-field with solemn thoughts of the high and low, rich and poor, one with another, whose dust is mingling there.

The visitation of sickness I am about to speak of, compared with that former one, is what good Bishop Hall would have called "a mere flea-biting;" yet it too has its "sadness and its story."

The last time that cholera visited England the Norminster guardians resolved to prepare for its approach betimes. There being no spare room in our old crowded workhouse, they obtained from the kindness of Lord Kendal, the "Marquis de Carabas" of our county, the loan of an old farmhouse as cholera hospital. It stood by itself, enclosed by a wall and protected by strong gates, in a field overhanging our tidal stream. A straggling row of low-class dwellings skirted one side of the field, a crowded

churchyard bounded the other ; it was disused, and a crumbling arch or two of an old chantry gave it a solemn interest. On the opposite side of the stream, some hundred yards from the extemporized hospital, rose a high rocky bank, crowned with handsome suburban residences of some of our magnates. Here due preparation was made in the summer of '66 for the expected scourge, or rather for such of our paupers as it might attack. The building, which Lord Kendal was intending shortly to pull down, was repaired, whitewashed, fitted up, and supplied liberally with medicines. The nurses—"ay, there's the rub"—the nurses were to be denizens of the workhouse, picked out as more able-bodied and quick-witted than the rest, but untrained and unprincipled. I say this advisedly, for when Anne and I compared notes with Grace Oakley touching this matter, we found that each of these *soi-disant* nurses was individually known to us as persons of more than doubtful honesty and sobriety. Conceive what it would be to trust such with stores and stimulants, and with the precious, endangered lives of parents and children, husbands and wives—at a time of general panic too,

for deep was the alarm with which Norminster awaited the coming epidemic. It could not be thought of; Grace, bright and determined, had, we found, already offered her services as nurse, to the guardians, and been joyfully accepted. With my mother's permission I followed her lead, and met with a cordial response also from the parish authorities.

Still the cholera came not; sultry summer had come and gone, and still it menaced from afar, like a thunder-cloud on the horizon. Not till late in September did a lightning flash issue from that cloud, and strike down one of the wealthiest and busiest of our fellow-citizens; next a woman died in Spitfire Yard, and two more within a day or two, and a conviction crept over the hearts of all—"the plague is begun."

Two days later a pencil note from Grace apprised me that our work had begun also. "Cholera Hospital, nine o'clock A.M.—Just arrived: three patients brought in: come at once." Without tarrying to confer with anyone, I set out, taking the first cab on the way. The streets were soon left behind, and the disused churchyard with its ruins, and we drove heavily

along a cart-track deep in mud from several days' rain. I alighted at the outer gate of the farm, crossed a yard surrounded by farm buildings, now empty, and entered the kitchen. The house, the whole locality in fact, was quite new to me. "Nurse Nanny," from the Union, was busy there over a caldron; and as with outstretched iron ladle she pointed me to an inner room, she might have personated one of Macbeth's witches. The sight of Grace's fair, serene face was cheering, and together we entered the "cholera ward." No gloomy spectacle met my eye; four whitewashed walls, alive with black beetles, a table, a stove, some chairs and six little white beds made up the *coup d'œil*. Three of the beds were occupied, and on approaching them I saw three curly, sandy little heads placidly reposing on their pillows; three freckled, childish faces, the image one of the other, looking comfortably drowsy from the soothing medicines that had been administered. It was a brother and two young sisters who had all been stricken down together in a house, the cellar of which stood several feet high in water. They were dear, good children, most easy to nurse, and their symptoms, though undoubtedly

Asiatic, were not virulent. They all got well and went home in a month, but the boy, Willy, volunteered after that to come to us every Saturday (his holiday); and manfully did he work, sweeping out our courtyard, or chopping up our wood.

When evening came, Grace announced her intention of sitting up this first night, and proposed that I should "go home and sleep soundly," so as to be able to relieve her the following night; by thus taking turns we should husband our strength for the campaign, whether long or short. So reasonable a proposition could not be gainsaid, and home I went, after changing my clothes, and washing face and hands. I was to relieve Grace at seven in the morning.

Raindrops lay heavy on the rank grass, as I crossed the field at the appointed matin hour. No one was about, so I proceeded to the ward, and saw with satisfaction that the three freckled little faces turned towards me had improved in colouring. But what was Grace about? I saw her standing at the foot of the furthest bed of all, watching intently. Hearing my step, she came up to me, her face white but composed,

and said, taking my hand, "Amy, is this collapse or death?" We stood by the bedside now. "Death," I answered, after a pause; death, unmistakably manifested by that marvellous steely hue peculiar to cholera, which had never met our eyes before, and which seemed to darken and assume a more metallic blue as we looked. The story was soon told; Mary Howard was a young married woman (the husband, a *vaurien*), and lived next door to the little red-heads. She had been brought in at three, already in collapse, from which neither hot applications nor stimulant could rouse her. Thus had my dear colleague met the first fatal onslaught alone. From that moment there was no going home any more; the plot thickened, and "cases" came in, sometimes singly and at intervals, oftener in groups of three or four, for ten weeks. Some of the latest cases were as virulent as the earliest had been; and the disease vanished quite suddenly and completely at last. Now I am not going to harass you with a detailed account of the doings of those momentous ten weeks; it would be useless to harrow up your feelings, or

"Give you, in recitals of disease,
A doctor's trouble but without the fees."

A few dissolving views of our cholera wards are all I wish to bring before you, selected with an eye to our main subject, the "streets and lanes of our city," and the best manner in which a woman can, without permanently renouncing her home ties and duties, try to do some lowly but real work amongst them.

A large low chamber at the other end of the farm, not available for hospital purposes, was appropriated as a bedroom by Grace and me. A faithful servant looked after her creature-comforts. Anne undertook the commissariat department for me, and daily hovered like a good genius round our walls, bringing home-letters and cheering messages, and lovely bunches of roses from a kind nursery gardener, who said "they might perhaps cheer the ladies." Above all, she brought good reports of our mother, who continued well and peaceful in her and H——'s companionship.

We were fortunate in Mr. Lomax's steady support and help, and in that of our Union doctor, who had sole charge of the little hospital. He visited us morning and evening, often quite knocked up by his outdoor work, for cholera was rife in the close alleys, and

many patients obstinately refused to be conveyed to the hospital, averring that they would be poisoned or buried alive there. Of course it was a grave responsibility, being left to our own guidance so many hours, but we had complete instructions given us, and a variety of medicines and all appliances and means to boot, so there was nothing for it but to act for the best. We kept the women employed in kitchen work for the sick, in washing clothes and sheets, in scouring with disinfectants; but the nursing by day and night, the administering of medicines, brandy, or food, we took upon ourselves; only we made them help with the friction, which the poor agonized creatures seemed to find relief in, and which some of them could scarcely bear suspended for a moment.

Our most stringent rule was, never to be absent from the patients at the same time; sometimes the services of both were needed through the night, but in general at ten o'clock punctually one of us went to bed till daybreak, unless roused sooner by the knocking at our outer gate which preceded the arrival of the stretcher. It was hard, very hard sometimes, to tear oneself away from some

poor sufferer at the crisis of the attack, but at such times feeling must not be indulged at the expense of common sense. Indeed I used to think that I was turning to stone; for after the refreshments of hot bath and brief devotional reading, I used to lie down and instantaneously fall asleep, regardless of the tragedy enacting downstairs, regardless too of the hosts of insect assailants brought in by the poor creatures from their low haunts, which under other circumstances would have "murdered" sleep. That curious instinct which nurses acquire of waking at a previously specified moment never failed either of us. More than once, indeed, Grace or I jumped up, prematurely startled into consciousness by a red blaze shooting into the dark sky before our window. The women were burning a straw bed, its occupant having died; this was done, as often as possible, before daybreak, to elude the notice of the townspeople, whose nerves were naturally shaken by these funereal fires.

¹ A friend of ours, who lived on the opposite side of the stream, and was often startled by these fires, confided her alarms to a sensible old aunt. This good lady's reply is well worth recording: "Eat plenty of mutton chops, my dear, and read the 91st Psalm every day."

Thus we learnt that another dear soul had passed away since we left the ward, but many hours might elapse before our colleague had leisure to give, or we to ask, the mournful details.

Acceptable gifts of clothing, wine, and brandy were sent by the kind townsfolk as soon as they knew that we were installed. The shirts and shifts were invaluable, for not a few patients were brought in in a revolting state, after lying twenty-four hours or more ill and untended. I possess still the huge scissors which Anne brought to facilitate the operation of shearing away these loathsome "Dejaniran" garments. They were flung into the court and set fire to at once, for in them, if anywhere, infection resided.

After the first day or two our hands were full ; scarcely had we laid poor young Mary Howard in the rude mortuary chamber, clasped those fingers that would not stiffen, and braided her splendid masses of black hair into a natural crown, than her two little boys were brought in. Three other patients from the same locality were installed before night. Either confirmed drunkenness or bad drainage accounted for all

these cases. Little Tommy Howard struggled through cholera, but sank under the secondary fever. We made him up a snug bed on the floor; but ten times a day he would stretch out his arms and cry, "Grandmother, grandmother, coom and tak' me, and carry me round the toon!" Then I used to pick up the little creature in his blanket, and pace slowly through wards and kitchen with his heavy head on my shoulder; and Tommy seemed quite satisfied, and would doze off in the belief that the kitchen was Norminster and I was his grandmother.

As the plot thickened, we found it necessary to draught our few convalescents to a room upstairs. It was spacious, and open to the roof-timbers, and commanded a pleasant view. With texts on the walls, and plenty of books and pictures about, and a heavy curtain hung up to screen off the air from the staircase, it looked quite habitable. Our only trouble was that its inmates sorely needed watching and food for their bodies and minds, and a controlling eye over the young, and reading and loving persuasion for the elder ones; and who was to do all this? We could not attempt it;

and the almost daily visits of our parochial clergy, though invaluable, were necessarily brief. At this juncture a note was brought which gladdened our hearts greatly. It was from a lady, a kindly and unwearied worker amongst the poor at her end of Norminster, offering heartily to come to us at once for "day-work." In a few hours Marianne Barnard was "one of us," inaugurated as "monarch of all she surveyed" in the convalescent ward, and a centre of order and cheerfulness there. She afterwards took an active part in the night nursing, devoting herself to it till the end, with one interval of illness from over-fatigue and strain of mind, and one of arduous cholera nursing in another place.

It was hard to lose three patients in twelve hours, as befell us one early day. Later on we had the grief of seeing five sink between sunrise and sunset. It was evident in most of these cases that their doom was sealed before they were borne through our gates. More like a nightmare than a reality comes back to me an incident that closely followed these two groups of deaths. They had left our numbers thin, and not a single anxious case on hand, so

(Mrs. Lomax having sent a better class kind of woman to sleep in the convalescent ward) Grace and I for the first time both went to rest. I lay down partially undressed, and was instantly asleep: soon after midnight, however, the gate was loudly knocked at. We ran down without delay, and admitted the *cortége*; it was no pauper, but a very well-dressed figure that was lifted from the stretcher; she "belonged to bettermost people," the Inspector said, and her clothing and gold ear-pendants testified to the fact; but her belongings had been seized with such abject terror at the sight of her attack, that none of them would go near her. The case being reported to the Inspector, he had paid a domiciliary visit to the house, and amid the cries and wailings of the family (not one of whom could be induced to lend a helping hand) he had escorted her here at once. Though spent and speechless, she was conscious, and seemed soothed by hot appliances and encouraging words; with touching patience she tried to swallow the prescribed medicines; yet more readily did she drink in the versicles from Psalms and Litany we recited in her moments of respite, turning her hollow eyes in the

direction of the speaker, as though craving for more. This went on for half an hour, and then brief, sudden collapse, and then rest. Within an hour of that first "forceful knocking" at our gate the ward was once more dark, still, and empty. Before the funeral, which took place next evening, a deputation of her "friends" came and begged to speak with Grace at the gate. The object of their mission was to claim the poor thing's earrings, which no one had thought of taking out. Grace at once repaired to the mortuary chamber, unclasped and brought them; a piece of complaisance the petitioners scarcely deserved.

There were several of these rapid cases. Others lingered long. We have peaceful recollections of an elderly woman, rough but kindly, who bore her protracted suffering very patiently and humbly, and seemed less concerned for herself than for her "old man," the partner she had "made her moan to these forty year." He used to sit by her for hours, stroking and patting her hand, while "tears ran down his cheeks like winter drops from eaves." Only when, at her desire, the Curate of St. Magnus came to administer the most com-

fortable Sacrament to her, the old man shook his head, and walked sadly away. A large portion of "cases" came out of that parish of St. Magnus, part of which lies very low. Its clergy, together with Mr. Helps and several more, proved themselves true "sons of comfort" through this visitation. The Bishop of the diocese, too, came to pray by our sick, leaving them and us with the blessing of peace warm at our hearts.

The Roman Catholic priests visited their flock assiduously: wherefore I know not, but so it was, that no denominational teacher appeared in the hospital at all.

We were all very fond of fatherless Johnnie, whose mother had deserted him, and gone to America. He was a gentle boy, and a favourite in the workhouse where he had been reared, and Mr. Lomax was so kind to him! He had pulled through the cholera stage of illness, and seemed to be getting well. I remember seeing a group of his workhouse friends clustering outside the window to catch a glimpse of him sitting up in bed breakfasting, and to ask how he did; and then came his cheery answer, "First-rate," and then a buzz of jubilant young voices exclaiming,

"Our Johnnie's getting on rattlin', all afore him! he's a-polishin' off the loaf like a lord, he is." But the secondary fever carried him off, notwithstanding Marianne's tender, assiduous care. Before his brain finally clouded over, he asked to be read to. Part of Revelations xxi. was selected, and he listened, and then asked simply and calmly: "Do you think the Lord is going to take *me* to the New Jerusalem?" In his delirium he called piteously for his mother; he died the fifth day, and was buried the following afternoon, kind Mr. Lomax following the coffin, which was strewn with white roses.

Two brothers of six- and eight-and-twenty were brought in together, and lay for three days very ill of acute cholera. Levi and Jabez Bland were tall, stalwart young men, civilized in manner, and apparently accustomed to all the comforts of life. But an extraordinary gloom hung over both, and especially over poor Levi, who was by far the more intelligent and interesting of the two. We knew nothing of their antecedents, but could not help gleanings from the talk amongst the women that their circumstances at home had been deplorable. Their mother had some months before destroyed herself owing to

domestic broils, and the sons had taken her part and quarrelled with their father. This accounted for the pair maintaining a resolute and defiant silence when old Mr. Bland came to inquire after them the third day. It was one of those miserable revelations which make one wonder how the discordant elements of society hold together at all. The old gentleman came clad in deep mourning; he stayed half an hour, and held forth to us and to his half-unconscious and wholly unresponsive sons in a style which made Grace and me surmise he was not unaccustomed to public speaking. He talked glibly of the duty of submission, of afflictions being blessings in disguise, and so forth, but his truisms were "too picked, too spruce, too affected as it were," to find favour in our eyes. Of course we showed all respect to his grey hairs, and made him free to come and go when he would, but he never appeared again. A visitor far more welcome to the patients came two or three days later, a modest, respectably dressed young woman, Levi's *fiancée*. Levi was in a critical state then; the acute symptoms had passed away, but left him pulseless and prostrated, and the liquid food and stimulant he took at stated and frequent periods,

“par ordonnance du médecin,” told no more upon him than if they had been so much cold water. He still “had his knowledge,” as the women phrased it, unlike his brother, whose wits (never bright, probably) were altogether suffused now. “Jabez, Jabez,” poor Levi used to exclaim, “speak to me, lad !” and Jabez would answer in an aggrieved voice, “I’m not here ; I’m with my uncle Sam, at Appleby ;” and so the brothers at times confused and distressed one another, and we would fain have kept them apart, but had not space to do so. A shed was in progress adjoining the farmhouse, for the better accommodation of the sick, but it could not possibly be completed for some days.

Levi looked calmed and comforted by the visit of his betrothed ; she had glided away, poor thing, with her veil down, looking so sad and drooping that it seemed kinder not to intrude spoken sympathy upon her. He saw me, book in hand, sitting by his bed, and made a sign expressive of his wish to be read to. It was the prodigal son, and I read it in a low voice, without note or comment, feeling more deeply than ever the unearthly beauty of every word. Levi lay quite still, listening.

It had been a trying day. A middle-aged woman, a slave to dissipation, had been brought in, thirty-six hours before, in an indescribably neglected state. There were four children lying dead in the house she was brought from, their father having refused to let them be moved. For lack of room below, we placed her in a spare bed, curtained off from the convalescent ward. Here we took turns to watch by her, and administered champagne and other restoratives ; but all was vain, and she had gone out like a candle that afternoon. Not a few such objects came to the hospital. It would be giving a one-sided view of cholera in the streets and lanes of the city quite to ignore them.

“ The course of passion, and the fret
Of godless hope and fear,”

combined with disease, laid many low ; but the theme is too painful to be dwelt upon, and this one instance shall suffice. The repulsive effects of self-indulgence, even on the outward form, were stamped with terrible distinctness on this patient—so much so, that when the time came for moving her body downstairs a panic seized on the paupers appointed to do it. Not one

would touch her, and the most imperative orders and threats of reporting them to Mr. Lomax failed to restore their nerve. It was not till I buckled to the task myself, with my utmost strength, that they could be induced to lend a hand in bearing the poor remains downstairs.

This duty accomplished, and a shower of diluted carbolic acid having been poured on floor and staircase, I looked in on Grace, who was watching by the brothers. Jabez looked drowsy and comfortable, but Levi's eyes were dilated and restless, and his symptoms were not satisfactory. It wanted but half an hour of Grace's resting time, so I strolled out into the green field to make the most of the interval. The evening breeze was rough, but deliciously pure ; it blew straight from those low slate-coloured hills that cut so sharply against the orange sky. It moaned round the corners of the house, and made wild music in the boughs of the elm near our gate. It shook the withered leaves from their parent stem, and bore them on its wings far out of sight ; and I watched flight after flight hurrying by, and likened them in my thoughts to the throng of souls that had passed, and were passing away, day by day, from this little hospital.

"We all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind have taken us away."

Anne's cheery voice, close at hand, broke through these twilight musings ; after a quiet talk with her I returned to the ward. Then followed the reading of the "Prodigal Son" to Levi, and of the "Evening Psalms" to another, and then a spell of the dear "Promessi Sposi," the solace of many a watching hour. All was quiet—quieter than usual ; the women engaged in preparing their supper and that of the convalescents—all but Nurse Nanny, who sat apart, counting up those everlasting pawn-tickets of hers, that lived in a tin snuff-box, and were produced and made the groundwork of abstruse calculations evening after evening. Our staff were on their best behaviour just now, for we had had a regular pitched battle the previous *Sunday* night, alas!—some of them having chosen that season for a drunken orgie of the most disgraceful kind. Mr. Lomax had supported us gallantly, and turned away the ring-leaders ; and since that, abject submission had been the order of the day. Well, nine had struck, and the outer gate been locked ; and our doctor had come and gone, after prescribing

some fever medicine for Levi. Suddenly, a shout from Levi made me start, and he sprang out of bed, and ran barefooted by me into the tiled kitchen ; there, with the strength of delirium, he began battering the house-door, and threatening to demolish it and us if we meddled with him ; he wanted to “get away,” to get into the open ; “he was on fire, and must be put out !” I imagine his blind aim was to escape into the field, and down the bank, and plunge for coolness into the stream below—that stream which had so lately closed over his mother’s head. Happily, his own violence speedily exhausted him, and after staring about him for some minutes, and smashing some of the kitchen furniture, he let us lead him back to bed.

Tired Grace had slept through this *charivari*, and I had not the heart to wake her, so took upon myself to despatch a messenger to Mr. Lomax requesting the loan of a strong man as soon as possible. The Union was almost a mile off, and several glittering gin-palaces lay on the way to try the fidelity of the messenger ; happily she proved trustworthy, and in an hour a muscular, intelligent, not ill-looking pauper,

named Bromwich, returned with her, and was put in charge of Levi and Jabez. Levi had swallowed his fever-draught in silence, and seemed calmer; Jabez's loud, regular snoring relieved us of all present anxiety on his account.

But the perturbations of that night were not over; it might be about two o'clock that a sound like a bugle-call woke me *en sursaut*. On reaching the scene of action, I found Levi standing erect on his bed, with some extemporized missile in his hand ready to fling, and a volley of frightful oaths, true "smuts from the pit," issuing from his lips. Grace stood by, watching him with soft, pitying eyes, which might disarm frenzy if anything could. The women were gathered in the doorway, with candles in their hands, uplifting their voices in a shrill gabble of expostulation; the patient was now obviously beyond all feminine control, and Bromwich nowhere to be seen! His nerves, shattered by habitual excess, had failed him, and he had made himself scarce at the first alarm. To despatch our messenger a second time to the workhouse, asking for further help, was the only course we could take, for we were quite out of the beat of the police. We did

this, then silenced the women, and put out the lights, hoping that quiet and darkness might have a sedative effect. Grace and I sat together on a vacant bed, watching by the faint glimmer from the stove, and wishing for the day. This paroxysm ended by his throwing himself full length on the bed, muttering and threatening; but a stronger one followed ere long. It was reaching a formidable height, when we heard the welcome sound of feet outside. The sky was crimsoning over with the flush that precedes sunrise, when two men appeared; Bromwich joined them in the kitchen, the sight of allies apparently "screwing his courage to the sticking place," and the trio advancing together, took poor Levi by surprise. In three minutes he was captured. It went to our hearts to see this fine young man caught in the toils like a wild beast, but there was no help for it. He never tasted food again, though we kept his lips moistened, and in about sixteen hours he sank. Mr. Helps watched by him and Jabez the whole of that day: the one was taken, the other left, for Jabez, after many ups and downs, got well, and went home. He found a young step-mother already installed, so his stay there

was short, and he has ever since lodged with a motherly old widow, who is very kind to him.

From this date, Mr. Lomax decided to have an able-bodied pauper on the premises day and night. Our first "squire of dames" was a man six feet two in height, and broad in proportion. Roach, commonly known as Cock-Roach, had been valet to a duke, and was supposed to have picked up "manners" in the ducal atmosphere, but the refinement was only skin deep. He drank so inveterately, and when "red hot with drinking" grew so ruffianly, as to be rather a terror than a protection in the long November nights; so we got rid of him within a week. He was, happily, replaced by a civil, honest, handy little old man, who did good service to the end.

I could tell you about little Billy and Nelly, and Nat, and Nat's clean, honest mother, all of whose lives trembled in the balance for a while, but who all got well, and are doing well, thank God! at this moment; but my time, and peradventure your patience, might fail. *A-propos* of patience, do you remember that pretty episode in the "Pilgrim's Progress," of Passion and Patience?—how the former raved and stormed,

and the latter was willing to wait. You may see it illustrated in this ward of the hospital. Little Terry McGrath is about four, the pet at home, used to his mother's knee ; but his mother cannot nurse him now, for her doom has gone forth, and she lies meekly awaiting it. So Terry is in my lap, rocked to and fro, and seemingly easy in his nest of blankets ; but his sweet baby face alters from minute to minute, the life and beauty passing out of it, till at last its hue recalls Raphael's demoniac boy in the Vatican. Then the breathing ceases. The mother's eye marks all ; she beckons me to bring him to her, and kisses his lips, saying dreamily, " My little son, to-night thou'lt be in Paradise." Now, Terence the elder comes in with the priest. Terence is a tall, emaciated figure, with a beautiful face, of the Spanish type, black curly hair touched with grey, and dark eyes, bright as diamonds. How holy and trustful he looks, as he kneels erect with clasped hands between his wife and dead child ! He knows that he shall soon be with them. Mr. O'Halloran recites in English a prayer from some old Liturgy, quoted almost word for word in our Bishop Andrewes' " Devotions ;" we may all join in that, for it was

written for our comfort long before mediæval corruption crept in. Then Terence hangs over his child-wife, and they talk together in broken accents ; we would fain leave them to themselves, but cannot, for Mary cries out if the friction is suspended for a moment. Terence says, at last, "he must go home and put the childer to bed ; with the Blessed Lord's leave he will be here again betimes in the morning."

We arm him with provisions for his little ones and himself, — much needed, for our doctor assigns their diet of "herrings and river water" as the cause of their virulent type of illness ; then Terence wrings our hands with that wonderful look of mingled anguish and hope only to be seen in some Italian *Ecce Homo* ; he ventures a glance towards his wife, as she lies there folded in a scarlet flannel cape, then slowly and resolutely walks away. "'Tain't worth that there man's while to leave this here place : " this was Nanny's true prophecy, as with arms akimbo she watched him pass out.

That night, Mary went, we gladly believe, to rejoin her little son in Paradise. Our next news of Terence came from the priest,—not the one I mentioned before, kind, earnest Mr.

O'Halloran, but his superior, though junior, Monsieur La Fleur. He was a Frenchman, and an original, this "Père la Fleur." He is said to have possessed a wonderful talent for teaching, and to have made quite a reputation for the college near Norminster, over which he presided ; but you never could have guessed anything of this from his looks or manner. He had a round, pink and white, merry young face, with the blithest laugh, and most "nimble spirit of mirth," and an inexhaustible flow of droll sayings, to which the pretty French idiom lent a grace. He often accompanied Mr. O'Halloran, on whom mainly devolved the duty of visiting our Roman Catholic patients, and lingered outside the wards for a *causerie* with one or other of us, while his colleague was at work within. I do believe he took a kindly interest in our welfare, and did his *petit possible* to amuse and distract our thoughts. On this occasion, however, he had come straight from the cemetery, having performed the last offices for Mary McGrath and her boy. We drew from him that Terence was there, looking ill—"très ma ! très mal !" He had lighted up with pleasure at the sight of the crown of white roses on the coffin, but he

was pale as an egg, *le pauvre enfant* ; and then he *would* kneel down in the wet and mud by the grave, and it was so bad for him, besides spoiling the knees of his trousers, which were of good broad-cloth !” This last statement was made in all seriousness ; and then the light-hearted Frenchman ran on to other topics, acting on his favourite maxim, *à quoi bon s’attrister ?* “For me,” he added, in his curiously accented English, of which he was not a little proud, “I am of a lively disposition, like the most of my nation ; I have no vocation for La Trappe—absolutely none, mesdames !” He laughed, and rubbed his hands, when one of us suggested, in the spirit of mischief, that perhaps the discipline of La Trappe might most benefit those who least affected it. “Ah, ah, my *shilde*, you are malicious !” he exclaimed ; “but we shall see you one of ourselves shortly ! Ah, I foresee it ! Meanwhile, *bon soir*, mesdames, for here comes my excellent brother.” Then he and Mr. O’Halloran walked away together, the very impersonation of *Allegro* and *Penseroso*.

Why does memory dwell on trivialities like these ? Simply because “the last of everything is affecting, ”and that was, to the best of my

recollection, the last time we ever saw M. La Fleur. He sickened of cholera a few days later, was devotedly nursed by some of his flock, and rallied sufficiently to be sent back to his sunny home and his old mother in Normandy. But atrophy had set in, and he did not live through the winter.

The double funeral had taken place on a Saturday. There was a lull on Sunday—no fatal case; and the church bells, flinging their music far and wide, lightened even our hearts, unwilling exiles as we were from our holy and beautiful house of prayer. Mr. Helps came early to administer the Holy Communion to us three, in one of the wards; we had covered the table with a “fair linen cloth” from home, and decked it with bright, sweet roses, to relieve the gloom of the place; and now, in the strength of that heavenly Food, we prepared to meet whatever it might please God to send of sadness and struggle. Early the next morning Terence was brought in: his coming created quite a sensation in that little world. He was laid in a passage room, where we had had two extra beds put up, for times of pressure. Later in the day the second bed received a tenant too, Brancker, an artisan

of about forty, of powerful frame—struck down, alas! in the middle of a “drinking-bout,” wherein he had tried to drown his terror of infection. Here were “Patience and Passion” side by side, Terence bearing his twelve hours’ martyrdom without a murmur, repressing all sound of suffering while the cold drops stood on his brow, and his cramped, knotted limbs almost defied our best efforts at friction. Hour after hour passed, remedies and warmth unavailing, gentle rubbing the only resource. As the strength wore out the fortitude increased, if possible; there was scarcely power for utterance in that close conflict, but one brief sentence, “I’m holding by the Cross,” gave the key-note of Terence’s thoughts.

Brancker’s was a dreary nursing; no self-control, no recognition (to the eye of man, at least) of God’s hand; no response to Mr. Helps’s ministrations, and earnest, loving appeals. His own brother, a rude but kindly attendant, fled at last, dismayed by the “shuddering start of passion in her might,” and so he sank. Terence seemed all the while wholly unconscious of the tragedy enacting within an arm’s length of him. In this and other instances, we were much im-

pressed by the state of isolation in which the spirit of each cholera patient appears to dwell. Whether selfish or unselfish by nature, the individual's whole powers seem engrossed by the effort of bearing his own burden. *Je mourrai seul*, a true saying always, is emphatically true often from the moment of seizure, in this most mysterious of diseases.

One proof more of a loving, grateful heart Terence, however, gave. I had bidden him point out the limb in which friction was most helpful, as the cramps were apt to shift suddenly from one part of the body to another. For a considerable time he made no sign, and I sorrowfully remarked to Marianne Barnard, who had just come in, that the rubbing seemed to have lost its virtue. Terence beckoned me nearer, and said, softly, "Lady dear, the rubbing is all the comfort in this world to me, but it's tired out you are, and I see it." Marianne, now liberated from a hopeless watch in the next ward, left Terence no more. She closed his eyes in peace, just as the Norminster curfew began to toll. He passed away so quietly !

"Night-dews fall not more gently to the ground,
Nor weary, worn-out winds expire so soft."

We were then at the culminating point of our mortality, and can recall the chill feeling at one's heart, when told that the postman had flung a letter directed to one of us at the hospital over the wall, and fled, lest he should come in contact with its owner. It gave us some faint idea, for the moment, of the isolation of lepers, as described in the Gospels. Of course, this general avoidance made any visit of sympathy doubly precious. One afternoon, about this time, I was concocting some "Liebig" for a patient, when Nanny bustled in with the information that an "ould gentleman were axing perticklar for Miss Dutton, but would rayther not come in." Outside our kitchen door I recognized grey-haired Lord Kendal, standing alone, with a slight nervous trepidation in his manner; but the gentle, benevolent expression of his face more marked than ever. For obvious reasons it seemed right to stand aloof from him, and so, for a minute or two, we respected my self-imposed *cordon sanitaire*; then the warm, unworldly heart within him got the better of prudence, and hurrying forward he grasped both my hands, asking with deep interest after our welfare, and that

of each patient. He added kind offers of help, and seeing one of poor Mary Howard's little ones running about in the kitchen, promised a provision for it in one of the charitable institutions which his beneficence helped to maintain.

It is time this recital of cholera experiences should cease, lest you should be experimentally reminded of Ruskin's remark that "monotony is pain." I will wind up with the singular history of Isobel Cairns, premising, as children say, that it ends well. It was the sixth week of our nursing, and the shed which I have told you the guardians built for our patients had just been completed. It was a solid yet airy and cheerful place; a thick curtain divided off the men's ward from that of the women and children. Kind friends had prepared for us a series of very effectively illuminated texts to adorn our cornice the whole way round, and two of the cross-beams of the roof were decorated in like manner. Everything here was clean, and might be kept so with ease. What a contrast to the low, gloomy, inconvenient rooms of the old farm, with their mournful associations—I had almost said superstitions! For the people about us

were intensely superstitious—some of them religiously believed (it was their only religion, I fear) that the place was haunted; they were full of signs and omens, winding-sheets in the candles, itchings in their elbows, which always betokened a death, and then what they talked of as the “death-call” among themselves in whispers! I firmly believe this last sound proceeded from our neighbours the white owls in the chantry, but such a suggestion would have been scouted by our women. Once indeed we had been able to dispel an alarm of this sort triumphantly, but only once. One of the convalescents chancing to stray into a ward where several sick folk lay, indiscreetly exclaimed that he heard the death-watch. “He heard it his own self, that very moment; it was all up with somebody!” This prophetic announcement might have wrought its own completion if one of us had not happily divined its cause. “Whereabouts is your death-watch, Willy?” asked Grace; “show me.” Willy pointed to a little shelf against the wall, on which stood a large jug of flowers: “It’s up there, Miss Oakley; I hear it a-ticking now—don’t you?” Grace replied by smilingly removing the flowers, and displaying a small

brass clock which the Rector of St. Magnus had kindly brought us as a loan that afternoon.

It was essential for us nurses to put a bold front on matters in general, as the slightest faltering would have "demoralized" this motley crew; but I must plead guilty to some very weird, uncanny sensations at times, some "faint cold chills about my heart" in the pauses of my work, causeless dreads and shudderings, moments when excited fancy seemed to push reason aside. There is a weir in the stream a little below our field, over which in certain states of the tide the waters flow with a hoarse murmur. That murmuring, heard in "the witching time of night," used to blend solemnly with the sadder sounds within our wards, as though "remorse and woe" had lent their voices to the unconscious stream. Even now the two remain inseparably connected in my mind, and memory lends a dirge-like undertone to the playful chime of those falling waters.

CHAPTER V.

“Ay me !

How weak a thing the heart of woman is !”

* * * * *

“Try what repentance can ! what can it not ?”

SHAKESPEARE.

OUR migration into the shed seemed to strike at the root of these morbid fancies, though some of our fatal and most abject “cases” were brought there. Isobel Cairns was carried in early one Sunday morning ; we had no previous notice of her arrival, and the first intimation I received was a quick call for help from Grace as I was reading the day’s Psalms to Jabez Bland. There were the men with measured tramp bearing the stretcher the whole length of the shed ; it was deposited alongside of the bed that was always kept in readiness for such surprises. A muster of “hot bottles,” india-rubber or stone,

was made; and meanwhile a young person of attractive and superior appearance, seemingly as ill as it is possible to be, was lifted out and deposited in the bed. The cramps were dreadful, and kept two of us at work, with short pauses, for many hours. Poor Isobel! if pain may be compared with pain, hers surely bore away the palm. There was some mystery hanging over her, evidently. The Inspector had been casually told of her state by a kind-hearted old labourer, and had found her alone, occupying a good room in a house of some pretension. It seems a panic had seized her hostess, for there she lay untended, with a baby ten days old at her side. Of course, the neglect, the recent birth of the child, the young mother's agony of mind, all these things made her state more than critical—hopeless to human eye. At first she seemed bewildered, and stared wildly round. Presently, however, she grew quieter, looked at Grace, then at me earnestly, and cried out, "Save me! save me! for the sake of the puir wee thing that has nane but me!" This piercing call startled us, and Grace glanced at me across the bed, with an all but imperceptible shake of the head. The truth was clear; that

cramped, distorted left hand wore no wedding ring; the story of the unhappy girl was one of sin and ruin.

It was hard to believe this; so modest, and neat, and refined did she and her surroundings appear; so plaintive and sweet was her Scotch accent, as she moaned, "My puir bairn! my puir bairn!" continually. Our anxiety to save her redoubled if possible; and, after ten days of the closest nursing, we had the inexpressible comfort of hearing her pronounced out of danger.

With the free leave of our kind doctor, a dear friend of mine, a Norminster physician in great practice, watched over this and several other cases. Till within a fortnight of our breaking up, he was the only practitioner admitted within our walls. His untiring kindness to the sick and to us, his almost daily visits at a great sacrifice of valuable time, "all for love and nothing for reward," we can never think of without a thrill of gratitude. The following remarks, extracted from Dr. M——'s notes (afterwards printed), show how extreme had been poor Isobel's danger:—"Violent cramps, &c.; thirst and restlessness excessive; she several times appeared to be dying; blueness and clamminess

of the skin, sunken eyes, and great exhaustion ; she was for some time picking at the bed-clothes. Chlorine administered regularly from Sunday till Wednesday, when Mr. — recommended the doses should be given at longer intervals ; flushings and excitement, but no after fever. Recovered."

Isobel was a "heavy handful" to nurse, it must be owned, so incessant and imperious in her requirements. "Oh rub ! rub ! rub my puir feet, the tain and the tither ! oh rub, and dinna cease ! Oh, pit some mair ice in my mouth—a wee bittie, Miss Dutton, a wee bittie !" This was her cry day and night, compelling us now and then to administer a rebuke, even while humouring her wishes. But, as the mother is supposed to feel a peculiar *tendresse* for the most fractious of her babes, so we cherished our poor forlorn Isobel with a special love, and she was not at heart ungrateful. The old workman whose timely intervention had probably saved her life used to call in most evenings to inquire after her, and it was pretty to see her joyful welcome of him when consciousness returned. Another visitor also came, the woman of the house where Isobel had lodged ; from her she

shrank with fear and aversion so marked, that we forbade the visit being repeated till Isobel's strength should return. The woman's account of her lodger was as follows :—Isobel came from the Highlands, and had left home and her widowed mother to seek, as so many do, service in England. She had lived some years with a well-known and respected family, whom we will call Malcolm, about thirty miles from Norminster, and had proved herself so clever and trustworthy a servant that, young as she was, Mrs. Malcolm had promoted her to be cook. This woman had been her fellow-servant for a time, but had since married a Norminster man; so she and Isobel had lost sight of one another till a few weeks before, when Isobel had written to her engaging her spare room for a month. Shortly after, the unhappy young woman had arrived in a state bordering on distraction. Her betrayer had proved heartless, and extinguished any hope that might have lingered in her breast of his offering her the poor reparation of marriage. Her mother, a widow of unstained character, would die of grief in her Highland home if the tidings of her child's shame were brought to her. All was misery within and

without. Nevertheless, the child was safely born, and the young mother seemed to be doing well, when Asiatic cholera in its most virulent type attacked her. The rest of her history we knew. "Where was the child?" we asked. "It had been removed," the woman said. Another of Mrs. Malcolm's servants, also a Highland lassie, from the same "toon" as Isobel, and her bosom friend, had come over on hearing of Isobel's removal to our hospital, and taken the babe away. Effie Polwarth had announced her intention of shortly returning to visit Isobel, the journey by train from Malcolm Grange to Norminster being a short and direct one. Our informant on this painful subject was a vulgar-minded, selfish woman. She coolly observed that but for this unlucky "collery" Isobel might have gone back to her situation and been never the worse! Mrs. Malcolm fully believed Isobel to be with her mother at Inverness, and would never have asked any questions, or, if she had, would be "easy put off." The woman enlarged on her own kindness to Isobel, the poor chance of repayment in full for her trouble, and the consequences to Isobel should her sad secret get abroad, in a hard, sneering tone, that redoubled

our pity for the hapless girl thus thrown on her mercy; and many were the anxious colloquies Grace and I held concerning her. We were glad when she was so far recovered as to be able to attend to Mr. Helps's ministrations and to our morning and evening family prayers.

The Sunday fortnight of her admittance was a thankful and joyful day to me, for I had been able for the first time since our hospital opened to attend divine service in a quiet, thinly-attended neighbouring church. Meanwhile Grace took charge of the shed. On my return from Evensong I found two neat young women asking for admission. The taller of them, a strikingly handsome and intelligent-looking girl, introduced herself as Euphemia Polwarth, in the service of Mrs. Malcolm of the Grange, and requested leave for herself and her companion to visit their fellow-servant Isobel Cairns. There seemed no longer any objection on the score of health to their doing so; the *mauvais moment* of the first interview must be got over. Perhaps the patient's intense restlessness and irritability of nerves might be soothed by their presence; so I ushered them in with an earnest caution against over-exciting her in her utter weakness. "And

remember," I added, "God has mercifully brought her back from the gates of the grave, that she may truly repent and return to Him; act as true Christian friends to poor Isobel; do not, do not advise her to take any step that would be displeasing to Him, I beg of you."

Euphemia's splendid dark eyes shunned mine while I spoke, and her face crimsoned; its expression grew positively repulsive at that moment. Pointing them to Isobel's bed, I joined Grace, and we remained a little apart, but could hear the sound of weeping, and see the sick girl's arms clasped round her friend's neck and the stately Effie hiding her face on Isobel's pillow. A whispered conference ensued, the purport of which we only learnt from its very annoying and disappointing results. The visitors partook of some tea we ordered for them, then departed to catch their train, Effie thanking us in her Scotch accent and reserved proud way for our hospitality.

Isobel was so exhausted that sedatives and rest were immediately needful.

I hasten over the next week, during which her mood seemed never the same for an hour together, waking aye and weary, every phase

of gloom and ungraciousness passed through by turns. Yet one could see she hated herself for it all the while. "Who can minister to a mind diseased?" we sighed to one another and to wise, persevering Mr. Helps. Her reserve continued unbroken, like a lava crust with a boiling stream flowing beneath. The wonder was that, in spite of all this mental turmoil, Isobel was getting well fast.

At this time imperative family reasons suddenly called Grace away from hospital work. It was like parting with a very dear young sister, for nothing cements love so fast as work of this kind done jointly. She, Marianne, and I had insensibly slipped into a habit of calling one another "sister," which clings to us still. We had been busy together, and sad and anxious together, and, more often than you would suppose, merry together; and what should part us now?

An influential newspaper reached us one day with a marked paragraph commenting in the most friendly spirit on our small doings; it wound up by asserting that we three "represented the three leading schools of thought in our Church." We could not but smile at the contrast between this

rather grandiloquent definition of our sentiments, and the very humble nature of the employments it found us engaged in ; one boiling bread and milk to suit the fastidious taste of Jabez Bland, another splitting up a huge lump of ice with a darning-needle, the third stuffing a bed with fresh chaff for poor Isobel. Truly it is a great and blessed thought that George Herbert has bequeathed to us—

“Who sweeps a room as for Thy sake,
Makes that, and the action, fine.”

Only let us try to work heartily together for His sake, and then variety of thought and feeling on minor matters will rather enhance than detract from the sweetness of communion with one another.

Grace was gone, but a loving Providence so ordered it that Marianne was set free within a day or two to return to the hospital. Not many patients remained there now, and they were doing well ; a sickly woman out of Abbot's Street, brought in under Mr. Helps's eye, had been our last arrival.

I think it was on the Sunday after Grace's departure that Euphemia reappeared on the

scene, accompanied by Isobel's landlady. There was an eager, stormy, whispered consultation between the three, Isobel sitting up in bed and looking with distressed eyes from the one to the other of her evil counsellors. Their tones and looks through the colloquy were so unsatisfactory, so unsuited to the day of rest and prayer and praise, that I could not let them pass unnoticed. I spoke a few words in a low voice to the group, urging upon each the duty of truth in their present dealings, upon Isobel the duty of hiding nothing from God and from her kind and too confiding mistress. God would help her to do this, if she asked Him honestly ; if not, however successful the deceit, she would pierce herself through eventually with many sorrows. At this, Effie threw back her head, and her eyes flashed defiance at me, though not a sound escaped her white lips. I wondered at the vehemence of her feeling, not knowing at the time the full depth and audacity of the plan concocted by her in order to screen her friend. Hers was the master spirit of the two, and, seeing Isobel crushed by her guilt and shame, she had originally negotiated for her with her Norminster landlady, and helped generously to

pay the expenses of her stay here. When cholera seized upon Isobel, Effie had put a bold face on the matter, and led their unsuspecting mistress to believe that it had attacked the girl at Edinburgh on her way home. This delusion she had kept up; and Mrs. Malcolm, really liking and valuing Isobel much, had readily consented to keep the place open for her. The weak point in this plot was its being known by Isobel's grasping landlady; but Effie hoped to keep her lips closed with a silver, perchance a golden padlock. In her zeal for her friend, she forgot the true saying, that "a lie has no legs." Effie went away with a sullen brow, more touched and pricked at heart, I could not help thinking, than that indomitable pride of hers would let her own. Again poor Isobel needed sedatives and rest, and to be left to her reflections.

I had my thoughts, too, for it was quite clear that Mrs. Malcolm must not be allowed to remain thus blindfolded by her own dependants; sooner than that, I would write; yet the task of informer was an odious one, and I could not bring myself to wave this threat over Isobel's head, thus robbing any confession she might

make of its only merit, spontaneousness. To wait a few days, and commit all to God, seemed the best way.

And, happily, God did work in the matter, speaking Himself to Isobel, not in storm, nor in earthquake, but in His own still small voice. That reached her conscience when nothing else could. The fidgety ways gradually passed away, giving place to deep sadness. She shyly asked me one day to lend her a Bible, and after that I often saw her reading—one might hope from the intentness of her look, *searching*—the Scriptures : then followed a gracious rain of frequent tears, freshening and cooling brain and heart as nothing else can. “Miss Amy, dear,” she said, one evening, glancing up with unwonted softness, “can ye spare me a minute, just?” I sat down by her bed. “Miss Amy, will ye write in the name of me to Mistress Malcolm, and tell her all the truth? I canna justly guide the pen mysel’, and it’s a sair burden I maun lay on her heart, puir leddy. But tell all, Miss Amy, tell all; for I canna draw near my heavenly Father with a lee in my mouth, and I’ll breathe freer when I’ve laid my sin and my shame at His feet!”

Then, with many breaks and bitter sighs, Isobel poured forth her history. Her mind reverted to early days, to her mother, to her father now dead ; to her home, and the rigid yet loving training those Presbyterian parents had given her. Her words brought Burns's "wee bit ingle," "clean hearthstane," and "thrifftie wifie," before my eyes. Then came the going forth into service, and the "braw hoose," and its many temptations and distractions. "Ah!" she said, wringing her hands, "so lang as I luved and keepit my Sabbaths, all went weel wi' me ; but the warld creepit in, and the Sabbath became a weariness, and I hearkened, fule bairn that I was, to ane that mocked at holy things ; and sae he has lured me over the pit's brink, and left me to perish." The dark tale of her fall and desertion followed in incoherent words, and then the cry, "Tell all, Miss Amy, all but my doole and wae ; ye canna tell the hundredth part of that ! And spare Effie ; she's a kind lass, is Effie, and never blistered her tongue with a lee till she did it to save me : and Effie has a mither to wark for, too."

On the whole, the tone of Isobel's confession was hopeful. It showed no love for vice, no

habitual light-mindedness, no desire to shift blame from herself to others. The base destroyer of her peace had found her no easy prey, for love of dress and personal vanity were not her weak points ; and it was only by having recourse to the most cruel and unmanly arts that he had got her into his power.

This view of the matter, which Mrs. Malcolm afterwards confirmed, makes poor Isobel's story specially instructive, I think. She sinned and she suffered simply from neglecting to watch and pray. By little and little she had allowed the sacred truths, learnt in her Highland home, to slip out of mind ; her conscience, tender at first even to over-scrupulousness, from its training under Covenanting influences, had become dull through wilful contact with evil ; scoffs and light talk, which once would have shocked her sense of right, failed to do so, and so she fell, poor girl,—fell away from the guide of her youth, and forgot the covenant of her God.

The letter to Mrs. Malcolm was written at Isobel's dictation,—a very humble, sorrowful, self-reproaching letter. Seldom has so painful an office fallen to me ; and the day but one after, when the reply was brought in, I doubt

whether Isobel's heart went pit-a-pat faster than mine. It must have been a terrible pang to her to listen to that reply. Mrs. Malcolm wrote so gently, grieving far more for the sin and deceit practised by her servants than for the exceeding inconvenience and distress entailed by them on herself. Indeed, she seemed lost in amazement and grief at the dark story. It was obvious, she said, that neither Isobel nor the fellow-servants who had abetted her falsehood could remain in her service: she had been compelled to give them warning, but would deal with them as leniently as was possible. She trusted that Isobel would repent, and pray to be forgiven; if *her* forgiveness could be any comfort to the poor unhappy girl, it was freely accorded.

Isobel seemed crushed to the dust by this letter, and, in addition to her own sorrows, Effie's loss of an excellent situation was a heavy grief to her. However, she was now in the way to find peace, and her "bosom being cleansed from the perilous stuff" which had choked its better feelings so long, she seemed to recover something of the spring and elasticity of youth. It was a glad day with us when first she rose

from her bed, and, supported by two of us, tottered half the length of the ward and back again. She soon "found her feet," as nurses say, and might be seen doing little kindly offices for the other patients; it cheered her to be employed in light culinary work at the stove in our shed, and she took special pride in preparing our nightly supper of "halesome parritch, chief of Scotia's food." Capital porridge it was, too! but this by the way. Isobel's dearest employment was reading. A dimness which had threatened her sight at first soon dispersed, and she then threw herself on our store of books, devotional and miscellaneous, with untiring ardour. From Dr. Vaughan's "Commentary on the Revelations," which she could scarcely lay down, to Marryat's pleasant "Masterman Ready," nothing came amiss to Isobel; but the Book of books still held the first place in her thoughts, and she used to look out the marginal references with a conscientious care few Englishwomen of her class would have practised.

November was come, and almost gone. The rain pattered against our windows, and several hailstorms had rattled on our long wooden roof with astounding din. The wonderful meteors of

that special year had played overhead on the 12th of November, one of our number counting more than a thousand of those brilliant fire-balls. Isobel was still with us, and remained in the hospital until the joyful day of our return home.

It took us by surprise at last; our Union doctor pronounced the three or four remaining convalescents quite fit to be moved; Isobel we placed in a lodging in Abbot's Street, under the wing of a motherly woman; the rest went back to their families. We only waited to surrender the keys to Mr. Lomax, and then, with rapturously thankful hearts, returned to ours. The halcyon calm of that first unbroken night's rest it would be difficult to describe!

It was a great relief to Isobel to hear from Effie about this time of her intended marriage to a respectable tradesman. The same letter, however, brought a mournful account of Isobel's poor baby; it had had a fall, through the neglect of its nurse, and its spine was injured. Her grief and solicitude on its account were deep. She at once went off to see it, though very unfit for the exertion, and she brought the poor miserable little object back with her, and tended it unremittingly till the time came when she had

to go to service. Its death was quite a blow to her, and she bewailed to me with bitter tears the "doom" her sin had brought on the "wee bit thing that hadn't sinned, like her." We liked her all the better for this warm feeling. We were pleased, too, with her strict honesty in repaying some money we advanced to her for its funeral expenses. We have never had reason to doubt for a moment that Isobel is bringing forth "fruits meet for repentance."

A train of circumstances not worth recounting here, led to Isobel's speedy return to her native Scotland. She has now lived above four years in a respectable family north of Tweed. She writes from time to time, and one of her letters lies before me now: "Isobel takes the liberty of troubling Miss Dutton with another of her ill-written letters, to say that she is well, and hopes her dear ladies are so too." Here the pronoun abruptly changes. "I bless the day when I was carried to the hospital. I was blinded with sin then, but now, thanks to God for His great goodness, I see." Then follows a string of affectionate messages to all who had befriended her.

Her last letter, dated January 1871, is written,

after a much longer interval than usual, from a warm nook in the south of England. With the bold disregard of pronouns that characterizes her style, she begins: "Isobel writes to you, but is ashamed to do it after being so long—but, indeed, I am not ungrateful, and my dear friends in Norminster are always in my daily prayers." She then relates how her "dear master" had been taken ill and they had moved to the south for his health, but he had died, and the shock had told so sadly on his young widow, that for some time she had not been expected to survive. "But, thank God for His goodness, she is better." The strain of the whole letter is most thankworthy as it respects Isobel's feelings and conduct.

Before our fifteen recovered patients dispersed far and wide to their homes or places of service, we had a solemn, happy gathering in St. Magnus's Church. Our tried friends the Rector and Curate officiated at this thanksgiving service, and the former addressed us briefly, in words which, coming straight from the heart, went straight to it. After this, we gave our patients and their friends, to the number of about forty, a substantial tea, in a room bright with flowers,

flags, and devices. Our clergymen were there and our good doctor, and Mr. Lomax, and Dr. M——, and harmony and chastened gladness possessed all hearts. It seemed a day that,

“In golden letters should be set,
Among the high tides in the kalendar”

of thankful memory.

These slight sketches of district work, or attempts at work, with its offshoots of poor-house and hospital experience, are but a few out of many pictured in my remembrance. They are by no means the most sensational that I have witnessed; the most sensational scenes are not generally the most edifying, nor the most helpful towards adding to one's stock of experience in such a way as may benefit others. On this head I would venture to say to my young sister workers, If the details of evil are unavoidably brought under your eye, let not your thoughts rest upon them a moment longer than is absolutely needful. Dismiss them with a vigorous effort as soon as you have done your best to apply a remedy; commit the matter into higher Hands; then turn to your book, your music, your wood-carving, your pet recreation, whatever

it is. This is one way at least of keeping the mind elastic and pure.

It is the growing intricacy of district work that I have tried to point out and furnish some clue to. The strands in the thread of social life become more numerous and perplexing year by year now that many "run to and fro, and knowledge (bad as well as good) is increased," and thought has waxed bolder (perchance too bold) in its range, and intellectual pursuits are open to the peasant as well as to the peer. Owing to these and other causes, high and low life are gradually melting into one another; or at least the sharp contrast between them is softening down. New problems to be solved, new entanglements to be unravelled, are continually arising. These will beset even the lowly path of the worker amongst the poor, and she must be prepared to deal with them; she will need both the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove.

Now let us take a parting glance at our work from the lower standpoint of homely Common-sense, Religion's best handmaid. The district visitor must have a distinct aim in all she does. "How," says the proverb, "can you ask your road till you know whither you intend to go?"

She must do and say nothing for effect; "praise be her penance here." She must be rigidly discreet, adopting from a nobler motive than self-interest the Italian motto, *orecchie spalancate, e bocca stretta*. She must not be made of "so slight elements" as to grow weary of her work because there seems little to show for it. "Have patience, and the mulberry-leaf will become satin." "By dint of much coming and going the bird builds her nest." She must use her best discrimination in reading character, and yet be content to be taken in sometimes—humbled, not soured, by such disappointments: "Love's mark outwears the rankest blot." She must crop down her own fancies and personal indulgences to the utmost limit compatible with the requirements of her station, in order to minister to the bodies of those whose souls she would fain benefit. "One doesn't *give* (in the true sense of the word) at all," said one of the best and most lady-like women I ever knew, "until one *pinches* oneself to give." Lastly, she must beware of ever deeming herself an isolated worker; that misconception tends to gloom and self-consciousness. The opposite and true view of oneness in our aims with good men and angels, of every

degree, is gladdening in the extreme. "We all belong to the same corps" was a favourite thought with the author of the "Christian Year."

A district visitor of this stamp, rich in these *petites vertus* which are yet so great, distinct in aim, unaffected, discreet, not soon daunted, trustful, tenderly indulgent, wisely open-handed, such a one must be blessed in her deed ; blessed now, more blessed still when her brief hour of work in the Master's vineyard shall have closed. May each of us, my sisters, be enabled then to say—

"My prayers and alms, imperfect and defiled,
Were but the feeble efforts of a child ;
Howe'er performed, it was their brightest part
That they proceeded from a grateful heart.
I cast them at Thy feet ; my only plea
Is—what it was—dependence upon Thee :
When struggling in the vale of tears below,
That never failed, nor shall it fail me now."

THE END.

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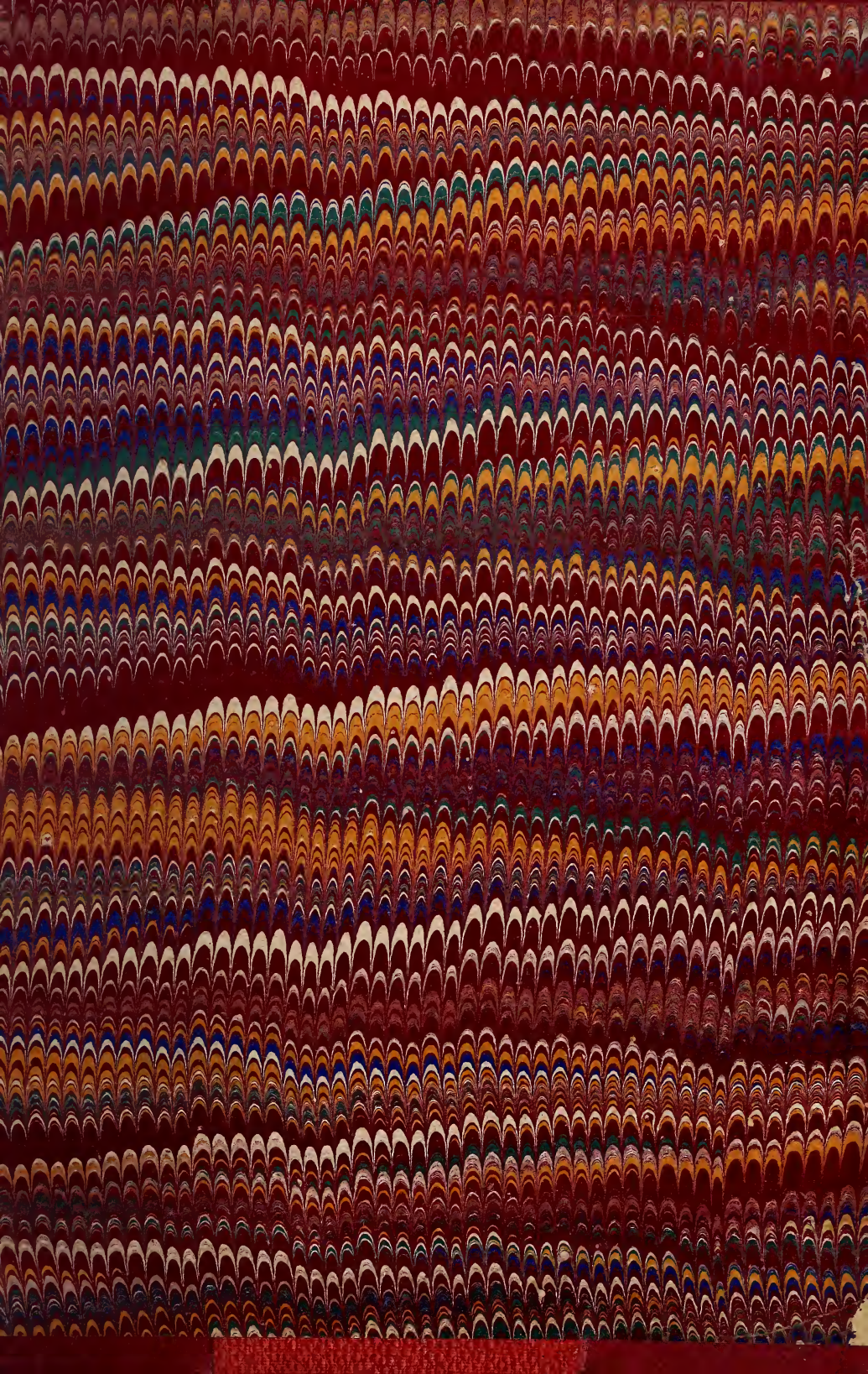
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